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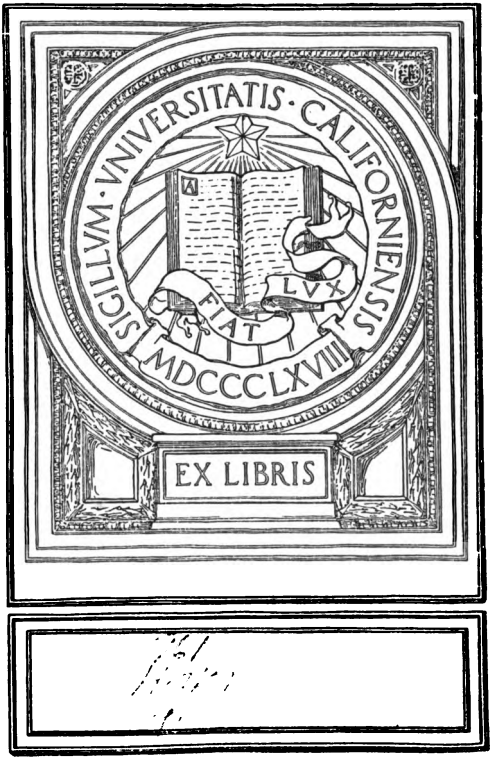
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The Penitentes of San Rafael

Louis How

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The PENITENTES OF SAN RAFAEL

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THE PENITENTES OF SAN RAFAEL

A Tale of the San Luis Valley

BY

LOUIS HOW

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

NEW YORK
HURST & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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TO MY DEAR FRIEND, PRESCOTT WARREN, FOR WHOM THE PENITENTES WAS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN, I NOW DEDICATE THIS TALE

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE PENITENTES OF SAN RAFAEL

PART FIRST

I

ONE LOVER THE LESS

AT a branching of the heavy sand road the young rider made toward a brown spot that might promise shade. He was riding down from the hills, where he had been fishing for a week, to La Jara, to catch a train. The San Luis Valley was pitiless with a mid-summer heat as monotonous as an oven. He had passed through the Penitentes' village, with its black crosses marking fallen cross-bearers, and was now in the midst of the broad plain. The sun beat down from a dead blue sky and the glare beat up from the brown sand. The mirage twinkled on the distant horizon. Even Mount Blanca, massive and blue, with a patch of snow on his head, did not look cool.

The horse plowed wearily along. But sure enough, after another suffocating interminable ten minutes, there was an adobe house, which seemed to be built right up against the blue sky. As he stopped to water his dejected horse at an artesian well trough across the road, a girl came

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running to him from the deliciously cool-looking darkness of the house. She had a pretty Spanish face.

"Get down and let me have the horse," she gasped, "I must go for the Padre. She's dying." And she pointed a dark arm to the adobe house.

She wore a coarse blue skirt to her bare ankles, and a brown blouse with low neck and short sleeves.

"Where do you want to go?" he said. "Antonito? I'll send the priest."

"No," insisted the girl, looking up at him with her eager black eyes. "I must ride. You can't ride. Get down!" She seized the bridle and shook it.

"Where are your own horses?" he asked.

"Sist' won't keep none," she said, quickly. "O, hurry! I must go. She's dying."

The shade of the porch looked very inviting.

"She must have the last Sacraments," she begged piteously. "Get down. Nobody won't hurt you."

She was on the horse as soon as he was off, and with a click and a slap on his flank, actually made him spring away and into a gallop. She turned in the high Mexican saddle to shout back, "Sit on the veranda. Don't go in!"

After drinking from the artesian well spout, he walked through the hot sand to the shade of the light roof resting on two poles that formed

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the veranda. Sitting on a bench against the house wall, he took off his wide hat and fanned himself with it, and wiped his flushed face with his handkerchief. The glare hurt his eyes so that he put on his hat again. He wished there were one tree in the blue and yellow scene. There was not a sound, not a breath of air; and except the girl on his horse galloping up the level road, there was not a thing in motion.

Once, while he sat there, a tired voice from inside called, "Dolores!" He turned and stared into the darkness, but could see nothing; and it did not call again.

The girl and the horse were getting farther and farther away till they were almost part of the mirage. At last it seemed to him, as best he could make out through the quivering steam of heat, that they had stopped. Then he was aware of another rider joining them. Finally the two moved off together, apparently on another road. It was hard to distinguish in the glare. They seemed to halt once more. He thought one of them dismounted. It hurt his eyes to look. Then he thought he got on again; or was it Dolores? Finally they rode off, hurrying in opposite directions. One disappeared in the mirage, and the other soon was only a speck moving along in the tremulous air near the ground.

Then finally a figure focused itself again on

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the road, coming towards him, on foot. It was the girl, and she came running back, kicking up a great dust.

"Where is my horse?" he cried, as she panted into the porch and sank down on the bench beside him.

"He's all right," she gasped, pointing up the road while getting her breath.

At the sound of her voice, the voice from within called again, "Dolores!"

The girl sprang up and ran in. Next moment she came out with a tin pan in her hand, ran across to the artesian well, and was back immediately with a pan full of water.

Soon she came out again and sat on the bench.

"I loaned your horse to Cristobal," she explained. "He didn't have no horse this morning. He'll bring him back," she added reassuringly.

"I hope so."

"Of course he will," she insisted, opening wide her very Spanish eyes and shaking her head seriously; "both of 'em 'll try to get here the soonest. I promised I'd marry the one that fetched the Padre first——"

"Marry——"

"Yes, sir. I give my hand on it. I wasn't really ready to make up my mind yet; but I don't know whether the Padre's in Antonito or La Jara, and she's dying."

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He stared at her. She had a rich complexion; and a fine large mouth with straight teeth.

"Is she your mother?" he asked.

"My name is Dolores," she said simply.

"But I guess she'll last till he comes," she began, again, twisting at the back of her glossy black hair which was falling. "If she don't, I've done all I could. She's only my half-sister anyway. She's a half-breed, too; I'm Spanish. And she's treated me cruel enough; but I don't want her to die without the last Sacraments. What more could I do, though? I've promised to marry one of them long before I ever thought to decide."

She laughed quite gaily.

"You see," she went on, crossing one bare foot over the other. He noticed how high her insteps were. "It's like this: they're the only two men in the Valley with real Spanish blood, and so I've got to marry one of them. I'm a Castilian, I am," she said proudly, but smiling rather cynically, as if in mockery of herself. "Anyway, my grandfather was. Anunciato ain't real Spanish; only Mexican. But he's the best looking, and he's on his own horse, and he's got the most money. Cristobal's the one I like most, though, and his father was real Spanish. But he's on that horse of yours. It just depends, though, who meets the Father first."

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For some time the two sat staring out into the bright sunlight. It was very quiet.

"Look at Blanca," said the girl. "The rain is coming in a day or two."

Then she began to laugh. "It's funny I met 'em both just there, ain't it?" And added tentatively, "I wonder what the other one will do." She shook her head in doubt.

Suddenly she jumped up. The young man followed her look up the road. There was coming a cloud of sandy dust, golden in the fair sunlight. Instinctively they looked the other way, too, and there was another one, much nearer. In this one the galloping horse could be distinguished, and there seemed to be two people on it. They could even hear the muffled beat of the hoofs.

A shout from the first rider swung both heads round towards him again. He was coming much faster than the other.

"That's Anunciato," said the girl, her eyes wide awake with excitement. "Your horse don't come so fast."

However, both horses, arriving at the same time, drew up so suddenly face to face that they reared back on their haunches; and the priest was beginning to slide down from behind Cristobal.

At her first sight of the two wild riders' faces, Dolores had darted into the house, and now was

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out again with a little pearl revolver in her hand. None too soon: for before the priest was down, the man on the other horse,—Anunciato,—had leveled his revolver at his rival.

The priest, leaning out from behind Cristobal, cried, "Anunciato, I am here!" and Dolores shouting, "I will never marry a murderer," shot off her pistol towards Anunciato. Her report rang only a thought before his; but her well-aimed ball, passing through his broad hat, knocked it down over his eyes so that he gave a start and his ball went wild. He didn't shoot again.

The priest, at once down from behind Cristobal, with the skirt of his brown robe held up in one hand and a small satchel in the other, was running toward Dolores, who ran to meet him. Before she reached him, Anunciato, on the ground the moment after he fired, had flashed past her, seized the priest, lifted him bodily, and turning had tottered into the porch, carrying him, and set him down inside the door.

Then he quietly strolled into the road again, supercilious, and tied his horse to the fence.

The young stranger, whose own horse stood with lolling tongue in the road, sat down again on the bench; and the two suitors took their positions at either end of the porch, one with a somewhat troubled, righteous air, the other with an ironically triumphant smile. He spoke

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to each of them; but they seemed to know no English. Both were of the fierce, black, southern type,—handsome and greasy: the one who had brought the priest on his horse had the more prepossessing face. Both wore leather shaps, flannel shirts, and spurred boots whose immensely high heels gave them insteps as fine as the girl's.

At last the girl came out. She had a white lace mantilla thrown over her dark head, with the ends arranged coquettishly round her brown neck. In one hand she held a closed fan that seemed to be of black lace and gold. Dolores minced once or twice up and down the earthen floor, with an affected strut. At last on reaching Anunciato's end she halted, tossed her head pertly, gave a little fling to the end of the white lace, half-closed her eyes, and said in Spanish, with a little drawl, something about "mantilla." Then she swaggered back to Cristoval's end, and spread the fan, and flirted it in the air. It had a brilliant picture of a bull-fight on it. She said something to him in Spanish about the fan. He made no more reply than Anunciato had, but he looked at her with love in his eyes.

Dolores haughtily turned from him to come with mincing steps to the young stranger in the middle. Throwing back her head and regarding him out of her half-closed eyes scornfully, she said pettishly in English: "I mayn't keep this

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mantilla, which was my mother's, because I ain't a blonde. So it goes to the church." Then she said, less affectedly: "Thank you for the horse."

Suddenly the priest emerged from the dark doorway making the sign of the cross. The two Spaniards jumped up with their spurs clanking and took their hats off.

Dolores cried: "Why, it's Father Maria de Jesus!"

The young stranger, who had just consulted his watch, decided to risk catching his train.

"Who did you think I was?" asked the priest.

"I thought you were Padre Emanuelé from Antonito."

Anunciato, waving one hand in excitement, cried gleefully: "Ha! she didn't tell you to bring the Penitente father."

"Any priest would do just as well," growled Cristobal.

"Then it doesn't count," laughed the other; "she didn't tell us to get him."

Dolores was looking with troubled eyes from one to the other. As Anunciato roared with forced laughter, Cristobal's face grew blacker.

"He gave her the last Sacraments as well as anybody," he insisted.

"Ha! but it's little Father Chucho!" sneered the other. "She didn't tell us to bring him."

Cristobal squeezed his lips together. Then he blurted, "Anyway, be still! You're a fool."

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Anunciato again began his mocking laugh. "The poor boy's cross," he jeered, "he's left out this time."

With one sudden reach behind his hip and a stretching forth of his right arm, Cristobal fired his revolver full into the other's chest. Anunciato, in the middle of a laugh, dropped dead.

The other three in the porch stared blankly at the murderer, who, with his hands trembling a little, picked out his smoking cartridge shell and dropped it on the ground, before he put back his revolver.

Then he said in a hoarse voice: "I thought I'd get this rival business finished."

"How dared you?" cried Dolores, with a sudden sob. "How dared you shoot my lover before me? You know I'll never marry a murderer."

"Won't you come to Las Animas with me? I did it for you. You promised to, Lola, and—and I brought the priest here," he pleaded tremblingly. "Won't you?"

But Dolores, clinging to the priest's arm with one hand, wiped her eyes on her white mantilla with the other, and shook her head no, many times, while she sobbed.

Cristobal looked hopelessly at her. Then he turned to the priest: "I must get away quick. Come inside and confess me."

The priest drew his arm away from the girl.

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After they were gone in, the young stranger, who had gathered the meaning of most of the Spanish, asked her: "Are you going to marry this one?"

She shook her head again.

"No," she said; "no, I can't. He shot Anunciato. So I can't. Anyway, not now."

She stood with set lips and dull eyes, gazing down at the dead man. All her airs and graces were fled, and it was a dejected young creature that at last, after twice making the sign of the cross and muttering some unintelligible words, said in a weak voice: "Put him straight."

The young man looked at her.

Her chin quivered as she said: "Please lay him straight. See how hunched up he is."

The young man, stooping gingerly, reached out one hand and pushed the corpse flat on its back; the arms fell into a natural position and he had only to press down the knees a little.

Dolores looked on with dry eyes. There was one dirty little spot of blood hardening on the blue flannel shirt.

"Have you got a handkerchief?" the girl asked quietly. "Thank you, I haven't got one. Put it over him,—there," she touched her bosom to show.

Cristobal and the priest came slowly out again. Turning to them, she asked with serious face: "What are you going to do?"

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"Get to Las Animas as quick as I can," answered Cristobal, trying not to look at the long figure lying at his feet. "Which way is that stranger going?" he asked. "He won't peach, will he?"

The girl translated the question.

"I'm going to catch the train north at La Jara," he said, "and I've just about time."

"If you see the sheriff, you won't tell," interrupted Dolores.

"Who is the sheriff?"

"Dave—"

"Oh, he's my cousin. Don't worry! He's up in the hills back there fishing, and won't be down for three days."

"Of course, he will tell no one," put in the priest in English. "It would be of no good. Since he is repentant, God forgives him; and to what purpose can man's vengeance serve?"

"No, I won't tell a soul," promised the stranger, "I've no desire to get a man—"

Dolores repeated this in Spanish to Cristobal, who had been listening with an anxious look on his face.

"You will come with me," he said, seemingly relieved.

"Certainly not," cried the priest with a step forward. "Can you pretend to be truly repentant, and yet keep the fruit of your crime? What sort of forgiveness would you hope for then?

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I have given you your penance. Go, do it. That's the only way you will wash your bloody hands of this murder. I will see that Dolores is taken care of."

He put out his left hand to the man, who, with a cowed look, held it, while the priest raised the other in blessing. Then Cristobal turned and without a word, crossing the road, began to untie the dead man's horse from the fence. As he stopped to let him drink at the trough, Dolores silently went over to him.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand.

"Good-bye, darling," said he fervently, seizing it. "You will come to me after a while; won't you?"

"I don't know."

"Don't say that, Lola. I did it for your sake. You forgive me, don't you? Yes, I know you'll come. I'll wait for you in Las Animas,—I'll wait two months,—or I'll send you word if I have to go to Mexico."

She let him pull her to him and kiss her fiercely.

After he was on the horse he leaned down from the high saddle, and looking into her face, besought her, "Say you'll come."

She shook her head.

"But I'll give you something to remember me by," she said.

"The pistol!" he exclaimed eagerly, looking

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with covetous eyes at the white pearl handle of it in the band of her skirt.

"No," she answered decisively. "This;" and she drew the fan from her bosom.

As the horse gave a restless start he seized it, and turned in the stirrups to wave it at her, as he galloped away up the hot sandy road.

The young stranger prepared to start too. The priest he shook by the hand, saying, "I hope this will all turn out all right;" but Dolores's hand he squeezed, and only said, "Good-bye, I must catch my train. Good-bye."

After he was gone the priest said to the girl, who was folding the white mantilla along its creases:

"I will take you to San Rafael with me. You can't stay here alone; and nobody will hurt them," he motioned into the house; "we'll come down again and see about burying her. But first we must put him inside, too, before we go. Help me," he said, stooping to put his hands under the dead man's shoulders.

"Oh, I couldn't," shuddered Dolores, drawing back.

So the priest alone dragged him inside.

The girl sinking down on the bench, leaned against the wall with her hand over her eyes, quite still; till she heard him call her. Jumping up with a start, she stood outside the door.

"Come in and light this candle," he called.

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"No," she answered, pleadingly, "I'm afraid to go in."

She stood leaning against the door-post till he came out again, holding a soiled cotton bag of money.

"I found this; and it'll be safer to bring it."

"You ain't afraid that—" began Dolores, waving her head towards the door.

"No, no! And anyway, I can't stay to watch. My people expect me. And I wouldn't leave you; and who else is there? Come."

"Wait," said Dolores, "I must have some clothes;" and she went into the house.

By and by she came out again with a big bundle tied in a red and black checked shawl; and they started out together into the blazing sunlight.

"How are we going?" she asked.

"On my donkey. I left him down here tied to a fence when I met Cristobal."

"Well, you have got faith in the men in the Valley," she said with a smile.

"Why, there ain't a man in the San Luis Valley that would steal my donkey," he answered. "They all know him; unless it might be the Saints in Ephraim and Manassa."

They walked down the road to where the donkey was.

The priest untied it and they got on,—he in front in the low saddle, she astride behind him,

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holding her bundle. The donkey started off in a slow gait, which was sometimes a dog-trot, but generally a walk. The sun poured down on them. There was not another living creature to be seen. On either hand the hopeless tawny desert spread rolling back to where in two bands of mist there seemed to be steaming blue forests, growing in shadowless, unstable blue stretches of water. Overhead the sky was blank of any relief in its blinding blue expanse.

With one arm Dolores clung to the Father, with the other clasped her bundle. When she found she could support this with her knee, she let it go for a moment, and taking her pearl-handled pistol from her belt she pushed it under the shawl into the bundle.

She noticed how the black hair grew into tiny twists, almost curls, on the priest's neck. Making a mouth as if to whistle, she softly blew among them. Then after a minute or so she leaned forward and poked her nose, wrigglingly, against his hair. The Father, who was assiduously saying his beads, took no notice of these caresses.

They slowly mounted the plateau at the foot of the hills. Although a stream now came alongside with real green trees by it, the sun still beat down with all his intensity and the glare never ceased. At last they drew near a scattering settlement of low brown houses. Near these

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was a cubical, windowless adobe building with a bare wooden belfry atop. Stuck up apparently without purpose in the sand were several gaunt black wooden crosses.

Thus they came riding into San Rafael of the Penitentes.

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II

A GENUINE ZURBURAN

THE young man who had so unexpectedly, through the loan of his horse to aid a girl in distress, become witness to a murder, found plenty to think of as he continued his way down towards the line of civilization, where the railroad runs through the Valley. His horse, even after a rest, was tired from its extraordinary exertion, and moved along slowly through the heat. This was now so great as to be almost unbearable; and the rider hailed with satisfaction the sight of a village shaping itself tremulously in the distance. He had, to be sure, rashly given his word not to speak of the tragedy he had seen; but he was filled with curiosity as to one or two of the actors in it; and besides, this cluster of brownish houses he was coming to must be Antonito, where he could find shade and shelter.

After traversing what seemed a very long distance farther after the first sight of the village, he finally arrived at it. One or two large adobe dwellings built round courts, a handful of smaller adobe houses facing a deserted dusty-white street, one or two wooden buildings, and the church made up the place. The church, however,

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—the most pretentious one, as he afterwards learned, in the whole Valley—had a certain quaint and dignified prettiness, and a restful color, that made it perhaps the one pleasing object in the bleak miles of ugliness; and moreover it was flanked by a cool-looking and inviting priest's house, which gave upon a garden, the one spot of green in the landscape.

With rather wistful eyes the traveler passed this pleasant place, and drawing up some distance farther along the street at a disreputable two-story wooden house, which bore the faded inscription "Antonito Hotel," he dismounted. A slouchy, fat individual, with one eye, appeared at the open door, and after taking a black briar pipe from his mouth, said, choking a little: "Are you lookin' for me? Want a room?"

"I don't think I care about a room, thank you. I should like something cool and long to drink, and you might put my horse somewhere in the shade, if there's any spare time before the train."

"Before the train?" wheezed the little fat man.

"The Denver train."

"The up train's gone. No other one till to-morrow. I can give you a room for the night."

"No, thank you," said the stranger, rather sharply. "I'll go on to La Jara when it gets cooler. But you can put up the horse for a while, and I'll come inside in the shade."

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He sat down and fanned himself with his hat in the dingy room where the bar was.

"By the way," he continued, as the landlord limped about mixing and bringing him his drink, which was long but not very cool, "there's some good luck in every chance. I can go and see that picture at the priest's house—that's here, isn't it? The Zurburan. And maybe the Father'll tell me something about the Penitentes."

The landlord had just dropped a large heavy book on the table in front of his guest, and after relighting his black pipe, he opened it and pointed with one fat finger, saying: "What do you want to know about the Penitentes?"

The young man looked at the book at the place indicated and then up at the one bleary eye of the hotel-keeper, which was fixed on him.

"What's this got to do with them?" he asked.

"Write your name, that's all. Visitors' book."

The young man took the pen offered him and wrote splutteringly, "Deloss Devlin," while the other continued: "I reckon you won't find out much about them from old Emanuelé. 'Tain't only that most generally he faints when he talks, but I don't believe he's tellin' many tales to strangers. You see, some folks 'a' got a kind of idea their a-goin' to try their tricks again this fall, sence there's ben a change of sheriffs, and most of the men, who could help form a posse, out of the Valley, at Cripple Creek; only they'd

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ought to get the Mormons to run them out, if they do try any of their funny business. The Saints is the best of the two in my opinion, and that ain't sayin' much."

"What do you call their funny business?" asked Devlin.

"Ah," wheezed the landlord, "you'd ought er heard Jerry Somerson tell his tales about 'em. Folks used to say he'd seen one o' their crucifixions."

"One of their what!" cried Devlin.

"Their crucifixions. They ain't had one now fer some time, but I reckon they're arranging it for this season, 'cause I seen that priest o' theirs down here to-day—"

"You don't mean to say that he—" began the other. "Why, whom do they crucify?"

"Oh, one of their own lot. Best thing to do's to let 'em kill themselves off that way, I always says. I ain't got no religion myself and so I don't get excited about it. But there is folks that thinks it's very disgustin'."

"It's shameful! Do you mean to say nothing's done to stop it? In the nineteenth century, in America! Does the priest here, you say, support it?"

"Ah, he's a poor sort of a creature," answered the landlord; "I don't go much for priests myself, anyway, though I reckon some of 'em is all right; but this here old Emanuelé is kind o'

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daffy now, and ain't much better himself than the Penitentes; and they're the lowest trash in the whole San Luis Valley. I wouldn't advise you to say nothin' to him about it."

"It ought to be stopped," exclaimed Devlin fervently.

"Well, I guess nothin' short o' havin' some soldiers down here'd stop 'em; there was some talk of that once, awhile ago when they used to be worse than what they are now. Folks is kinder losin' interest in 'em lately." The landlord ended in a fit of smothered coughing, and recovering, sucked at his pipe, which had again gone out.

"Then you tell me about them," suggested Devlin; "if the priest won't. Who are they?"

The other slowly lighted his pipe again and said: "They ain't much to tell's I knows of. Folks say they come up here from Mexico as long ago as before the Mexican War, and they're the only ones I know of anywheres round these parts; so I guess it's true all right. They're peaceable citizens enough, not harmin' nobody except themselves. Now and then they turn in and have one o' these revivals and crucify someone, and I reckon that's about all there is to it."

"You're sure they do it?—crucify, I mean," persisted Devlin.

"O yes. I guess they ain't no doubts of that."

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"And they're going to do it this year? When's the time for it? Soon?"

At this juncture a rough-looking man in shaps came noisily into the room and asked for whisky.

"As fer whether they will or not, I guess only themselves knows, and old Emanuelé," replied the hotel-keeper, getting up and limping behind the bar; "and the day fer it comes along somewheres next month or maybe the month after."

"What's that?" demanded the new-comer roughly, eyeing Devlin.

"The Penitentes," replied the landlord.

"Are they up to their damn tricks again?" said the man nonchalantly.

Devlin rose.

"I'll be back for my horse," he said, starting out.

"You won't get no satisfaction," called the landlord after him, divining his destination.

He had divined right. Devlin walked slowly back to the church, keeping in the shade; and turned in through the neat but rather arid garden. He knocked at the door of the priest's house. It was presently opened by a gaunt elderly woman, who looked him over sharply.

"Might I see Father Emanuelé?" he asked.

"What about?"

"I thought perhaps he would show me his famous painting," he replied tentatively.

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With pursed lips she glared at him for a few moments.

"I'll ask him," she then said; "he's ill, and I don't like to have him disturbed for nothing;" and she closed the door in his face.

A minute later she opened it again, saying: "You may come in; but don't stay too long."

She opened another door on her right. Devlin went into a large, dim, but comfortable looking room, where a fat, soft-looking priest in a black robe stood awaiting him.

"You have come," he began in a thick, tremulous voice, "to see the famous picture. Here it is." He pointed to a large, dingy painting in a heavy, tarnished gold frame, which hung on the wall. "It came from Mexico many years ago; and it is a genuine Zurburan, signed." His breath seemed to fail him, and he sat down in a large arm chair, gasping and holding his hand over his heart.

"You must excuse me," he said, when he recovered his breath; "I am not very well. This morning I had a very bad attack, and my duties are so heavy."

Devlin mumbled some words of sympathy; and stared at the faded painting, which, Zurburan though it might be, was not only very hard to make out, but seemed scarcely worth the effort.

"I suppose it ought properly to hang in the

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church," went on the priest; "but it always has hung here, and I hate to change it. It is so valuable, too."

"You dislike giving up old customs," ventured Devlin, turning to him; "I am so much interested in the Penitentes."

"Hey?" asked Father Emanuelé blankly.

"I say, speaking of old customs, I am so much interested in what I hear of the Penitentes of San Rafael. I happened to meet their priest this morning."

"Father Maria de Jesus is a very estimable and pious man," said the other.

'So he seemed. They are a curious people, are they not? The Penitentes? With some peculiar rites of their own?"

The priest stared at him vaguely, and then replied: "Oh, yes, yes; they are a simple folk, partly Indian. I suppose their life is different from that of most of us; very pious, though, and holy."

Just as Devlin was about to try another attack the priest said suddenly: "You are a Catholic?"

"No," replied Devlin, and added, as his host shook his head sadly, "but I have the greatest admiration for the Catholic Church in general."

"I wish you were to remain here some time," said Emanuelé, "that I might have the honor to convert you."

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Devlin smiled

Again the sallow face of the priest grew paler; with a gasp he put his left hand over his heart, and leaning back in his chair, stretched out his other ambiguously.

Devlin seized the opportunity to take the outstretched hand, saying he must go. As he thanked him for the chance to see the painting, Emanuelé seemed to revive somewhat, and attempted to rise; but his visitor last saw him sinking back once more into his chair.

In the hall he caught sight of the elderly female hovering about darkly, and as he went out, saw her reopen the door of the room he had left and go in.

He returned to the hotel again, where he found Wezel ministering in the bar to half a dozen of the natives of Antonito. As the afternoon was now beginning to be cooler, he asked to have his horse; and Wezel, who was his own hostler as well as his own bartender, soon found a chance to bring the animal round to the door.

"Well, I guess you didn't get much satisfaction from the old man," he said, grinning, as he held the horse.

Devlin shook his head.

"The only way to stop 'em'd be to get the bluecoats down here and clean 'em out," said Wezel; "unless you could rouse up the Saints to do it."

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III

AT SAN RAFAEL

AS Father Maria de Jesus and Dolores on the donkey rode up the gentle incline, leading to San Rafael, the priest, hanging his rosary through his rope girdle, half turned to the girl and said: "I will get Panchita to take you in. To be sure, she has Pasco there; but he is a quiet fellow and her house is big. I trust you will decide to stay among us here. We are a quiet people; we have no excitements like those in the plain,—like the one to-day, for instance. All the force of our feelings we put into our religion, giving it to God and His Mother. That mantilla of yours you will offer to San Rafael for his altar, will you not? You can't wear it, and it would look beautiful there, and he will be so pleased."

She nodded. "If you wish," she said.

When they were near the brown church he turned the donkey on to the open. Coiled up on the ground a man was lying in the sun there. He was the only person visible; till from the nearest house, a wider one than most of them, came hurrying a withered woman in a draggled gown.

Putting one rough hand on the donkey's

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neck, and looking up with bleary, eager old eyes, "What news?" asked she. "Does he say yes? Shall we have our fête?"

"All in God's good time, Oestocris," replied the priest. "See this young woman. I have brought her here to stay with us."

The old woman looked so searchingly at Dolores that she colored under her dark skin.

"Who is she? She's a good Catholic?"

"O!" cried the priest deprecatingly. "Now, Oestocris! Would I bring a heretic among us? Or a Saint?"

"What's her name?" asked Oestocris sharply.

"Lola," ventured Dolores.

"Lola, aha!" repeated the old woman; and then turning her eyes again to the Father, "and we shall have it?"

"To-morrow you shall hear all about it," replied he, clucking to his donkey.

"To-morrow!" jeered the old dame mockingly. "Where you going now?"

"To my house, of course."

"Yes; to your house," she muttered. "You mean you are going to tell Cristoké all about everything."

"Cristoké shall hear nothing any sooner than you," he reassured her.

"Where's that girl going to stay?" she called after him.

"With Panchita," called back the priest.

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Mumbling crossly, the old creature hobbled back with dragging skirt to her house.

At the next house a girl came out into the porch and stood looking at them. While Dolores was staring back at this girl, who wore a red waist, the priest got off and took the bridle to lead by. At another house a little dog was fast asleep in front of two old men who lay back against the wall, feeling the sun on their eyelids.

All three awoke at once. As the dog stood wagging all over and making an internal noise like muffled growling, one of the old men limped briskly forward, and the other followed.

"God and the Archangel have prospered you in your mission, Father Chucho?" wheezed the first old man.

The other one stared at Dolores.

"I trust they have, Cristoké," said the priest. "But I have promised Oestocris to tell nobody about it till to-morrow. So go back to your prayers."

Sunday morning Dolores was hysterical. She lay on her bed sobbing; and when Panchita came and said kindly, "Come, Lola, the bell is ringing for mass," she only sobbed the more.

"Lola," urged Panchita, shaking her gently by the shoulder.

Dolores, sitting up in bed, began to laugh nervously in her hostess's face.

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"Come, we must hurry," she repeated.

"I won't go," choked Dolores in the middle of a laugh.

Panchita's hand dropped from the girl's shoulder; and Dolores buried her face and shook with sobs. The fat Panchita, dazed, retreated from the dark little room. In the porch she found her son Pasco, patiently waiting. He had on white cotton trousers and a rather clean blue flannel shirt. His head and feet were bare.

"I don't know what to do about that girl," said his mother despairingly.

Pasco only looked at her in impassive silence.

"I suppose I'll have to speak to the Father and send him down here to get her. Come on."

They met the priest at the church door. While Panchita explained, Pasco stared solemnly at the two of them.

"Well, let her be," said Father Maria de Jesus. "She's excited and sick, poor girl!"

"But, Father, miss mass!" Panchita was horrified; and even Pasco's placid eyes seemed to grow intense.

"She shall confess it to me to-morrow," he replied indulgently; "and you know God and the Blessed Virgin are there with her in your house as well as in the church with us. People from the plain lose control of themselves more than we do; and we must make allowances."

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But Panchita took early occasion after church to warn her son that that girl could not be a very good Catholic and that they should have to be careful. To which Pasco made no verbal reply.

Mass was never said in the Penitentè church that all the forty-odd inhabitants of San Rafael, down to the youngest naked baby, were not there. This morning only Dolores was absent. The windowless adobe walls were hung with the cheapest shiny chromo pictures of the Blessed Virgin, the Infant Jesus, Christ showing his bleeding heart, and divers Saints. On the white painted altar was already spread the white mantilla; on it stood two red pottery jugs filled with green leaves; and above the crucifix with its life-sized waxen corpus hung San Rafael in oils, with tremendous crude blue and yellow wings, and holding a cross.

Before the sermon the small boy in scarlet who served mass, stepped down and sat on the edge of the railless chancel; and Father Maria de Jesus in his grass-green chasuble, after kissing the stole, put it on. Then all the Penitentes rising made the sign, and muttered the invocation in the same breath with him.

He waited till they were again seated with their eyes fixed on him, when, looking over the heads first of the man on one side, then of the woman on the other, then out the open door to

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the mountains in the blue distance, he began his sermon:

"Penitentes, it is well known to all of us, how when our fathers left Mexico and set out into the wilderness to find a land for themselves, San Rafael going before them in a cloud, led the way here. That was before any of us was born; but I have heard the story from those who followed our patron through the desert from Santa Fe, and so have one or two of you." (All the women looked at Oestocris, and the men at Cristoké.) "They themselves are all dead long ago. When they arrived at this place, which the Blessed Virgin had promised them in a vision, San Rafael manifested himself to them in human form, and crucified himself on this very spot; where they built this church to mark and to memorize the miracle. Without windows they built it, for the Lord is the light of it.

"His pious followers were transported with joy at the Archangel's goodness and condescension in thus giving himself to be an expiation for their sins, in imitation of our most Blessed Lord; and they made a perpetual vow to celebrate forever the anniversary of this sacrifice. This vow of theirs, solemnly made to San Rafael and to God, is binding on us.

"In those happy, innocent days when the Valley was as God made it, before the railroad came and it was full of whites and Saints and sinners

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of all kinds, the celebration was kept every year. I can remember, when I was a child, twenty crosses and more erected here, round about this church, each one marking the sacred spot of one of these pious sacrifices. Now how many are there? Six! Six in all; and some of those represent a good work undertaken, but unfortunately never ended.

"Penitentes, it is three years since we have kept our own special, holy fête of San Rafael,—since we have kept it fittingly and to the honor and glory of God, as a humble emulation of the sacrifice of His Son and as an expiation of sin. I know we are a good people; I know that in God's eyes we are the salt of this Valley; but I know there is wickedness among us, too. Wickedness that I alone do know; for it has been confessed to me as your Father. And as for the Valley below us, we all know what a den of corruption that is. There are the two cities of the infidel 'Saints,' as they call themselves,—new cities of the plain; and even among those that profess to be Catholic Christians there is no end of their murder and greed and adultery and lying and horse-stealing and gambling.

"And if we are better than they, is that any reason for us to set ourselves up on our hill and wait for the wrath of God to destroy them? No! If there should come a cyclone to-morrow and root up Ephraim and Manassa, and blow down

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Antonito and La Jara, would that be a cause of rejoicing to us? No; a cause of sorrow. Noah went into his ark when the flood came, and took in his wife and family and his oxen and mules and dogs; and then he locked the door on the poor drenched sinners outside crying to him to save them. But Noah was not a Catholic. San Rafael had never led him through the desert from Mexico. That was before God had taught men Christian charity, and put the light of Christ before them, and showed them how to save this wicked world; before He had commanded us to go and do likewise in memory of Him.

"Besides, there is a sin of our own that I will tell you of,—not a private sin, but an open, public one. God has led us into a paradise and we neglect it. You are lazy, Penitentes. Every one sees it. The heretic mocks us! You have good lands that God gave you, and yet where is this summer's crop? Down in the plain the heathen have fields of potatoes and alfalfa, and we here have nothing.

"God does not like this, brothers; and it is one of the things we have to expiate. But we have not only to expiate it; we have to remedy it. So, I tell you all, go to work to-morrow and give up lying in the sun all day; and when our fête arrives God and San Rafael and the Blessed Virgin will aid us, and we will keep the holy feast in their honor, which we were forced to give up last year."

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He stood looking at them a moment. Then he lifted his arm to make the sign of the cross. He turned again to the altar with its tears of yellow candle flame, and continued mass.

The ceremony finished, the Penitentes silently filed out into the brilliant sunshine. Once out of doors, they began to talk glibly enough, forming into groups near the church door. As soon as the father came out in his brown robe they gathered about him and several voices at once asked him, "Who is it to be, Father?"

Smiling, he shook his head.

"Who will be the Christ, Father?" cried Oestocris shrilly.

At her, too, he smiled enigmatically, and replied, "God will tell us."

Then glancing round the group he said, with a serious look in his black eyes: "Remember, my children, what I told you in there about your fields. We cannot have our neighbors making fun of our sloth. Rest to-day, for it is the Sabbath. But to-morrow no more laziness. If you are not all in the fields, except those who have other necessary work, I will put off the festival till next year."

With another glance round the circle of sober faces, stepping out from among them, he started towards his house. They fell to talking again; but Oestocris and the limping old Cristoké followed him. Each took one of his arms in its

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rough loose sleeve, and each turned a jealous old eagle-like face to him.

"We'll remember, Father," began the old crone, wheedlingly, trying to soften her sharp voice, "I'll take out a hoe myself to-morrow and poke among the weeds as hard as I'm able; I'll set my boy Paez to sharpen the hoe this afternoon."

"To-morrow, you mean, Oestocris," growled the old man hoarsely; "didn't Father Chucho say no work was to be done on the Sabbath? And God told him to say so."

"That work itself is holy," retorted old Oestocris, "because Father Chucho preached it to us. But even if we don't begin till to-morrow I expect we'll start before you get your old bones to moving."

"Yes," interposed the priest, soothingly; "we must all get our crops out. I promised Father Emanuelé not to delay it any longer. He blamed me for not having got at it already."

"Emanuelé has no business to blame you," cried the old woman angrily.

"Hush," reproved he, "don't say that."

"I will say," she persisted, "that he would do very well to spend his time in as many holy deeds as you do. Tell me, Father," she wheedled, "who is to be our Christ."

"I told you," he insisted, "that I don't know. God will tell us. We must pray to Him to

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quicken our eyes. But I will say to you two," he went on, looking from one to the other of the eager, fiercely-moulded old faces, "that in about four days we shall invoke the Holy Spirit to come down upon us and point out the chosen one. Friday, I think,—when we are fasting and therefore clear-sighted."

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IV

A PROMISE OF HELP

DEVLIN had been much impressed not only by what he had been able to learn about the Penitentes, but also by the horrors that his imagination led him to build on his rather scant knowledge; and they continued to occupy his thoughts, both on his ride from Antonito to La Jara, and largely for some time after. It seemed to him a crime greater than that of the misguided people themselves for others more enlightened to allow such practices as theirs to go on; and he before very long decided that some duty in the matter was his, and resolved to do what he could to fulfil it. Wezel's suggestions about soldiers had not much impressed him. Filled as he always had been with a great respect and admiration for the Roman Catholic Church, a respect unshaken even by the sight of such ineffectual workers in it as Father Emanuelé, he felt that it lay with that tremendous institution to cleanse itself of the blot on its fair escutcheon; which, besides, he felt it could do more efficiently and more gently perhaps than the strong arm of the military.

With this idea still strong in his mind, he con-

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trived soon after his arrival at Denver to procure a letter to the principal of the Jesuit College there.

The college, a heavily impressive building, stands in large grounds, the front part of them being laid out in a fair garden, the side in a great bare field, with football goals at its farther end. The front door sprung open at once on Devlin's ringing, and a severe serving man in black took his card and his letter, and ushering him into a parlor, said he would carry them to Father Mansifee. It was a huge, gaunt room, with neatly drawn shades. On the four walls hung four paintings,—one an excellent copy of Murillo's Immaculate Conception, the others portraits of Ignatius Loyola, of the suave and genial Pius Ninth, and of the kindly and beautiful statesman, Leo the Thirteenth. In a few minutes the principal came in. A tall, thin man, with a keenly intellectual and ascetic face, he was stamped clearly gentleman and man of the world. In a voice which rang peculiarly true, he said a few formal words of greeting.

Devlin at once jumped to his subject. "I have come to ask you to talk over an important matter."

The priest's expression slightly changed.

"Oh, I thought you wished to go over the school," he said. "If it is business, may I ask you to come again? I am very much occupied."

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"It is not precisely business," said the visitor, turning to go.

The Jesuit laid a hand on the young man's shoulder. "You will excuse me I know. Come to-morrow, can't you, at three, and we'll have a chance to discuss the matter. Is it personal? No; then you'll not object to a few of my colleagues being present."

Devlin bowed at the door of the room; but Father Mansifee followed him out to open the front door for him.

"I am sorry," he repeated, "to be so hurried; tomorrow at three."

Devlin, somewhat uncertain as to whether or not he was prepossessed by this very business-like churchman, but with his purpose stronger than ever in his mind, returned the next day at the hour set. He was received by the principal in the same gaunt parlor, but this time with a sociable air that set him somewhat at his ease; although when at the sounding of a large gong, his host conducted him through one or two long bare hallways, where he saw files of boys marching in the distance, he felt once more out of place.

The principal led him into a small room, where there were two other priests waiting for them. They were both in black and smooth-shaven, and despite the individual diversity of their faces, had the same keen, cleanly, and cul-

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tured look, and the same quiet refinement of manner.

Father Mansifee presented his young guest to his two associates, each of whom, as his name was mentioned, rose and bowed. The one next to Devlin shook his hand cordially. The introductions over, the principal turned to Devlin and said: "If you feel ready to broach the matter you mentioned, now, I am sure these gentlemen will be equally interested with myself in hearing it."

The eyes of all three were on the stranger as he answered, hesitating somewhat with embarrassment: "It may seem to you presumptuous on my part, but I feel sure you don't know,—or at any rate, don't appreciate, how—to—well, to what degraded customs religion has led some of your fellow Catholics in this State."

There was a momentary pause. Father Mansifee, seeing the hot blush that spread over the young man's face, said courteously: "You are a Protestant." Devlin nodded. "I am sure there are some Protestants who would not be so kind as to attribute our shortcomings to our ignorance."

Devlin gave him a glance of gratitude.

One of the three Jesuits assented in a calm, smooth voice:

"Father Mansifee certainly expresses the pleasure all of us feel in realizing that the time

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has come when those who have fault to find with our Church, do so as man to man, whereas they often used to resort to the press. It undoubtedly makes us quite as anxious to redress any grievances that may occur in the merely human management of any institution no matter how sacred."

The flush faded from the young man's face as he answered with a great deal of forceful sincerity: "It is only because I respect your Church so much that I came to you,—because I feel that you can stop it. I am sure you do not know that the Penitentès down in the San Luis Valley are preparing to have another crucifixion."

There was again a momentary pause.

"I have heard of the Penitentès," said one of the Jesuits.

"You are quite right," said Father Mansifee, "in believing that this is news to us. When is this crucifixion to take place?"

"On San Rafael's Day," answered Devlin; and he went on and told them all he had learned about the matter.

The Jesuits listened to his account serenely; only interrupting and helping him out with two or three pertinent questions.

"It is very dreadful," said Father Mansifee, shaking his head, when Devlin had finished; and then added, "I can only admire your judgment in bringing this grievance before us, though I re-

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gret that it should need to be done by a person outside the Church. But it would certainly be a hideous mockery, and an impossibility, that the one institution which has outlived the centuries and has always been in the fore-front of modern thought, should permit such a blasphemous outrage of one of its most sacred tenets to continue, once it has been brought to its notice. But though the end is obvious, the means require careful thought. As a matter of fact, you know, we have no jurisdiction in such matters. Only the bishop can order it stopped; and knowing, as I do, the bigotry and lawlessness of the Penitentes, I doubt if they would obey him. We can, of course, use our influence to help. Your friend Wezel thinks," he continued, "that the army should be called upon to interfere. Undoubtedly he knows more about the Penitentes than either you or we, being on or near the spot."

One of the others, however, suggested: "An ignorant person on the spot may probably know less than an educated man at a distance."

"Quite true," agreed Father Mansifee. "What is best of all is an educated man on the spot. But nevertheless I think there is a good deal in Mr. Wezel's suggestion. Beyond a doubt, these poor people are out of their heads with religious mania, and the clearest seeing and most persuasive of preachers might argue in

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vain. He might of course prevent the occurrence of their crucifixion while he remained among them; but probably his influence would end with his departure. On the other hand, a body of troops who could be so timed as to arrive on the scene and take them red-handed in the act, would be justified, I suppose, in arresting all those implicated; and in the end they might either be committed to some asylum, or else scattered here and there in small groups, where their influence would be harmless."

"The greatest difficulty," put in one of the party, "would be to have the movements of a body of troops so nicely timed."

Everyone smiled.

"Perhaps the movements of our army are not governed with such diplomatic precision," admitted the principal; and turning to Devlin, he continued; "I do not want you to think we are trying to avoid the responsibility, which I ought to say we thank you for putting upon us. I assure you we shall look into the matter and do not mean to shirk it. I shall speak to the provincial about it and consult him as to the propriety of telling Colonel Lawless. But, I think," he said, with a slight smile, "that even if the main work is handed over to the military arm we shall be represented also in the field."

"San Rafael's Day is not for some time yet, I believe," said Devlin.

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"Next month," responded the Jesuit.

In a few minutes he rose, and so did all the others. They stood silent while he said to his guest, "I must say once more how much we all thank you. And when at last this unfortunate superstition is stamped out along with others brought originally from Spain,—stamped out, I may add, perhaps through the efforts of that great religious army which also owes its origin to Spain,—then you will be justified in feeling proud of your part in the matter. And," he added, "let me express for us all, our wish and prayer that you may by that time see your way to being one of the great Church you are even now helping to defend and serve."

The other Jesuits bowed graciously to Devlin; the one next him cordially shook his hand, saying, "Amen, to the Father's prayer!" and the principal himself opened the door they had entered by and ushered him out.

"Be sure," he said, as he shook hands with him in the vestibule, "that your efforts will not have been fruitless, nor your humanity unrewarded," and he bowed most courteously to his departing guest.

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V

A GREAT FEAR

AFTER the murder of Anunciato and his parting from Dolores, Cristobal on the dead man's horse went galloping off to the east toward Las Animas County; but before he had ridden long, even in his perturbed brain, thoughts began to form themselves and to persist. And the thought that troubled him most, becoming finally so fierce that it drove all other ideas of safety from him, was that he had left there at the house, besides the dead body of Dolores's sister, that other dead body,—lying in the shadow truly, but likely enough to be found even before he could get back there and hide it. He turned his sweating horse, cursing himself for a fool, and drove the rowels cruelly into the weary animal's sides.

He forgot that this was Anunciato's horse he rode; he only remembered that if the body were hidden it would be natural enough for everyone to think that Anunciato had gone off again on one of his sudden trips to New Mexico. Then he would be safe.

There was no one in sight on the dusty yellow roads. He made a detour to avoid any village or ranch house. The setting sun shone into his

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eyes from over the western hills and dazzled him; but fate seemed to be leading him along by the right way. As he neared the low brown house where the dead were, he drew in his horse, going slower and slower from a trot to a walk, and at last stopping still. The horse stood in the middle of the road, its sides heaving, its head hanging low, exhausted. For a minute Cristobal sat there as in a dream. Then he raised himself in his high stirrups, and looked around about him over the Valley on all sides. In the thickening dusk of evening he saw nobody; in the hush of twilight he heard no sound, except the panting of his horse, and the gurgle of the artesian well opposite the house. It was a house of a dull, somber brown, with the blackness of night inside its open doors and windows. He was afraid to go there.

He patted his horse's flank to give himself comfort, but there was no comfort for him; and shaking his head disconsolately, he laid the rein against the patient beast's neck. Even while the horse turned, Cristobal changed his mind again, and made it turn full around. He felt a strong desire impelling him to go to the house and to see the man he had murdered,—to see him and to touch him. Slowly he dismounted, and, trembling, led the weary horse to the fence across the road. Tying it there, he gathered himself together and tried to approach the house.

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He could not move. He dared not. For a long while he stood still as death, trembling. At last with a great effort he took a step forward.

The sun, red as wine, suddenly dropped behind the hills, and a moment after the Valley was dark. Cristobal stooping, leaned over the water-trough and put his hands together to drink; but before he might drink, he straightened up again with a start, looking about him as though he had heard something. After waiting to listen to the intense silence, he ventured to take off his hat, and having filled it with water from the well stream, drank.

He murmured a prayer, making the sign of the cross, and went cautiously over to the house and into the porch.

He bent down and felt for the body. It was not there where it had lain in the porch. A great fear came upon him that some one had already been there and found it. He moved about the porch, feeling for it with his feet. It was nowhere there. He stopped, stunned. Then the idea flashed upon him that the priest had buried it; or had taken it into the house. At the open door he hesitated only a second before plunging into intense darkness inside. No sooner was he in the house than he gave a loud cry, from sheer fright; and then cowered in a corner, waiting. Utter silence followed.

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With shaking fingers he drew a match from his pocket and struck it. In its sudden glare he had sight of all the room with its shadows, of the dead woman in the bed, and of the dead man there at his feet. He dropped the match. But he had seen where a candle stood on a table; toward which, with care not to stumble over the body on the floor, he groped his way, and lighted it.

There was not a breath of air to move the flame. In the dim but steady light his courage came in some measure back to him; and his first impulse led him to take the candle and examine the only other room in the house. There was nothing there.

After some search he found a spade lying in a corner, and with it he came back into the room of the dead. The face of the woman on the bed was hidden by the sheet over her, but the face of Anunciato stared up at him with its closed eyes. He took the handkerchief, which Dolores had had put over the bloody spot on the dead man's shirt, and dropped it over the face.

Then he set to work with the spade. He dug near the wall, as it was his plan to hide the grave by moving the bed over it. He was forced therefore to turn his back on the room; but after every spadeful of sand he would glance behind him over his shoulders furtively. The sand made a low caressing noise, as it slipped

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from the spade. All at once he heard a sound, and stopped digging, holding the spade in the air. It was only his horse kicking restlessly against the watering trough; but it caused him to turn and smash his palm down on the candle flame, extinguishing it. He shook again with fear, thinking how some one might have passed and looked in.

In the dark he dug with difficulty and had no way to know when the grave was deep enough, but by going into it to measure. At last he had finished; and, hot with his toil, he rested, sickened at the thought of touching the man he had murdered. As he stood there in the dark and the silence the idea came to him that perhaps it was not the priest who had brought the body in there. He had heard before of the unburied dead moving from place to place for the sake of companionship. He felt for another match and lighted it. No, the bodies still lay there motionless in their places. But then he had heard, too, of the murdered dead refusing to lie quiet in their graves. These night stories shook him now and chilled him. He would have run from the house, except that there was no way out but past those two. He could hear his own teeth chatter. Until the flame burned his fingers, he did not drop the match.

He dared not stay there longer in the dark, whatever might come of it; and he lighted the

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wan candle again. Then he dreaded to stay there with the light on his deeds; and his very dread nerved him to lay strong hands on the murdered man and to drag him across the floor and tumble him into the grave. In hopes that the body might more surely lie quiet if it were comfortable, he forced himself to go down on his knees, and to lean over and straighten its legs and arms. Then springing up, he shoveled back the sand with a sudden desperate haste, and stamped it down smooth. With the same energy he pulled out the bed with the dead woman lying under the white sheet upon it, and pushed it over and lifted it, until it stood above the grave.

Then blowing out the candle with one breath, he rushed from the ghastly house; and untying his horse with mad haste, sprang on its back and galloped away with the cold, deathly terror still in his heart.

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VI

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD

CRISTOBAL arrived early Sunday morning in Las Animas County. Putting up his horse at an hotel in a small town, he went to mass. Although nobody recognized him, and his City of Refuge seemed therefore fairly safe, yet his first care after mass was to have his long black mustache shaved off, and to buy a new hat and a new suit of what in his eyes looked like city clothes, from an accommodating friend of the barber's, who opened his shop for him on his representation that he was going that morning to Denver. Doubtless both the barber and his friend thought him a horse thief, and after having seen him consistently ride away in the direction of the railroad, would have discreetly sent any inquirers about him off on some wrong trail.

Cristobal rode no farther than the next town, where he alighted again at an hotel; and, going into the bar, sat morbidly there the rest of the day, thinking what he should do, and thinking of Lola. His sullenness created so much remark during the afternoon that he finally judged it more inconspicuous to be sociable. So he began to drink with a miscellaneous crowd of

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ranchmen and loafers who were there. However, as Cristobal remembered, liquor loosens the tongue; and not wanting to lose control of his, he drank carefully. He never had considered how the carefulest drinking alters the workings of the brain; and as the sudden evening shadows fell, though he could not be called drunk, his mind was full of shapes. One shape was Anunciato in his grave, moving about uneasily till the sand above him became humpy, and the bed where the dead woman lay rocked, and people coming into the silent house looked at one another with wide eyes, saying, "It is strange!" and added under their breath the name of Cristobal. This fume of fancy made Cristobal feel cold down his back and arms, and shiver, and also made him choke over his whisky. Unpleasing as the picture was, he could not erase it from the tablet of his mind; but there in the smoky little bar, where the vile smell of the sooty lamps was beginning to down the vile smell of cheap whisky, and where the atmosphere was thick with curses and filth, where he knew in his very soul there was no one dead and no silence; he could see as plainly almost as he saw his boot, the edges of sand trickling out untidily from under the bed which he had put there to conceal them, but which now only rocked and rocked, and showed that there was some one underneath it.

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He set down his glass and struck himself with one fist on the head. He knew he was awake; he knew he was not drunk; but nevertheless he knew, when he stopped to think of it, that this thing he saw was all a dream; and yet, might not the fresh sand really show in the daytime? He had covered it so hurriedly in the dim light, and while so frightened, that probably it might. He would go see,—at once. Up he jumped, forgetting that it was now night.

His companions jumped up, too, swearing noisily, and demanding where he was going; but Cristobal, with an oath on his own part, throwing two Mexican dollars through the tobacco smoke to the bartender, told them good-night so definitely and swaggered out with so much Spanish dignity, that they said they were relieved to have this low-born wretch away, and shouted after him, when the door was closed, directions as to his route.

Back once more, again through the warm night, over the same road he had traversed the night before, morning indeed dawned and the sun rose at his back before he came to the fatal house.

Not over-trusting in his changed appearance, he kept a nervous hand on his rein, and the other ready to his revolver, as well as a keen eye about the plain; but as usual there was no sign of life in the Valley; and the house, of a less somber

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brown in the oblique morning light, was just as still and forbidding as before. He dismounted a little way from it, and led his horse by the bridle, going very slowly, with a sharp ear on the alert. All at once he paused, drawing back a little. As he listened there was a sound from within the house,—a mumbling sound,—a voice, —a voice praying. The dead do not pray, not in the morning at any rate. In an instant Cristobal had a foot in the stirrup, ready to mount. Then smiling scornfully, he hesitated again. Neither did the living pray among the dead in the morning in Cristobal's experience, except priests.

He therefore advanced again; and sure enough, when he stopped to tie his horse, there on the other side of the house stood the little donkey of the Father Maria de Jesus.

Then Cristobal went boldly enough into the porch. Looking into the room, which the one square of daylight on the floor made bleaker and more dismal than ever, he saw the priest on his knees by the bed, and heard him praying. In a moment or two, however, Father Maria de Jesus, seeming to feel the steady gaze fixed upon him, stopped short in his prayer, turned and rose, confronting the intruder.

"Who are you?" he said, rather sharply, not recognizing in the light checked suit the rough plainsman of his former acquaintance.

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"Don't you know me, Father?" asked the other in reply, a tone of satisfaction in his voice.

Peering keenly at the face, which he could scarcely see as the new-comer stood there in the doorway with his back to the light, the priest, recognizing the voice, exclaimed "Cristobal!" and dropping his own voice to a sterner key, demanded: "What have you done with the body of Anunciato?"

"You have not found it, Father?" asked Cristobal, yet more satisfied at the question.

"Found it!" repeated the Father sternly. "What have you done with it? Tell me!"

Cristobal pointed. "It is there," he said obediently, "under the bed."

The priest turned slowly to look.

"Buried," explained Cristobal less confidently, and hesitated, then went on, as if compelled: "I was afraid—some one—would come—and see it."

The priest turned again and faced him. At the very look of the little man, who, even now, erect as he was at his full indignant height, was scarcely taller than the other's shoulder,—at his very look of indignation the murderer was cowed. He twisted his shoulders uneasily, searching for words.

"Take off your hat!" commanded the stern, deep voice of the priest. "Show that respect to the dead, at least in my presence."

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Cristobal obeyed.

The priest paused, but not with hesitation. Finally he began, with a forced calmness: "Three of us," he said, "saw your unpremeditated murder. I absolved you of the sin, believing in your true repentance, such as often comes as suddenly as the crime. The other two swore not to divulge it. Did you fear lest God, satisfied as I was of your remorse and of your resolve to lead a good life, would have betrayed you to a mere human punishment which could not have helped your heart nor yet have undone the deed? You did fear it. And so you came stealthily and buried this man to hide him away, where even I could not have found him unless I had met you now. What you have come for now, I do not know. I cannot see what further impious intention may have been in your heart. Perhaps you are driven here by one of those avenging voices from heaven, which drive the unrepentant to and fro on the earth, and make them haunt the scenes of their crimes like madmen. If such a voice has driven you back here now, it is well; for so I have learned where your victim is hidden, and I can give him a Christian burial, as I had intended to do when I came here this morning.

"Cristobal," he continued, his own voice itself sounding in the ears of the other like an avenging voice from heaven, "do you know what you have done, or meant to do? Anunciato was a

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good Catholic; he died, I know, suddenly, with the stain of sin on his soul—but he died by your hand; and I do not know which of you would have been the more responsible for his unconfessed sins. God is very merciful, and knowing that, I came here, prepared as his humble servant to take my part in showing that mercy, and to bury Anunciato with the same rites in the same consecrated ground with this absolved woman, to whom I gave the last Sacraments;" he muttered some words and made the sign of the cross; Cristobal, standing with his head down, did likewise. "Thank God," pursued the priest, "thank God in his goodness to you, a very sinful man, that you found me here. The consequences of your unfaith can now be repaired; and perhaps your sin may be less black than if you had caused the Catholic dead to lie in unholy ground."

He stopped, and gazed fixedly at Cristobal, who stood nervously moving his fingers. In a kinder voice, he added: "Come, help me now to move the dead."

Cristobal, with a sigh of relief, raised his head, and hurried briskly to aid the priest. Together they lifted the low bed, and moved it back to where it had before stood.

"Take your spade," said the priest, "and dig him up."

With silent docility, Cristobal applied himself to the task, taking out each spadeful, however,

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with timorous hesitancy. At last he spoke unquietly over his shoulder: "If any one comes—"

"Be quiet," said Father Maria de Jesus peremptorily. "Go on. I am ashamed of you;" and directly afterwards, "have I not promised?"

Cristobal continued, with set, pale face. When his spade struck the body he shuddered; but gathering himself together, he lifted off the rest of the sand in thin layers, until the form of the dead man, lying straight and comfortable, as he had placed him, could plainly be seen under only a light covering of it.

"Must I take him out?" he said, rising, and rubbing his cheeks with his two palms.

"Yes," the priest nodded, "I will help you."

Cristobal took the feet and he the shoulders, and together they lifted out the body. They laid it along beside the shallow open grave.

Then the priest, thinking, with one hand over his face, hesitated. "I do not know," he said, aloud, but as if to himself, "whether to have you read the responses. Your soul is very black with sin—and yet," he decided, "we are all sinful, and God does not forbid us to worship him."

He started out of the house; and Cristobal, not liking even in the daytime to be left there alone, followed him. Father Maria de Jesus, untying from his donkey's saddle a small leather satchel, took it into the house and opened it there. Taking from it a pair of candlesticks and candles, a

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crucifix, a breviary, all of which he set down carefully on a bench, he took out finally a bottle of holy-water and a holy-water brush. With these in his hands he started out again, Cristobal, as before, going after him. At a word over his shoulder from the priest, the other turned again into the room and fetched the spade. Following the directions given him, but without a word on his own part, Cristobal marked out on a smooth spot of sand behind the house a square about eight feet; and then leaning on his spade, watched with solemn eyes while the priest performed lustrations and recited prayers. This ceremony finished, he was set to work to dig the two graves; and these he made, out there in the blessed hot sunlight, with more alacrity than he had shown over the other. Father Maria de Jesus, after watching him for a while and making one or two suggestions which were straightly observed, left him. When Cristobal, his labor finished, returned to the dark house, he found the candles lighted, and the brown form of the priest again on his knees murmuring prayers. Without a word he rose at the other's approach, and when he stooped and put his hands again beneath the dead man's shoulders, Cristobal understanding, again laid hold of the feet, and together they lifted him and laid him alongside the bed, at the end of which the priest had erected his temporary altar

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"You can read?" said Father Maria de Jesus, handing his breviary to Cristobal.

"Yes, Father; but not this. This isn't Spanish, nor English."

The priest taking the book back from him, said: "Then I will say the responses to you, and you repeat them after me, word by word."

Cristobal bowed his head.

So they said the funeral service over the dead; the priest reciting his portions of it, with the ease of familiarity and the reverence of a full and honest heart—the stammering assistant in his light gray checked suit, repeating witlessly as best he could, the Latin words told slowly to him, making the sign of the cross when the priest made it, and kneeling and rising according to the motions the priest made him with his hand. The alternate fervid and halting sentences alone broke the hush in the gloomy room, with its shadowy bare corners, and its piercing ray of sunlight which, coming in through the doorway, made the two candle-flames by contrast pale and ghastly.

When the time had come, they lifted the bodies, each in its turn and carried them slowly and wearily out to the newly blessed grave-plot. There, in the full expanse of day, there was as little sound as even in the house. The air was still and thin, but quivering with intensity of heat. As the two ended the simple service, already the

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drops of sweat were thick on their dark faces; and when Cristobal had finished filling in the graves, he was wet and panting.

Father Maria de Jesus, hurrying back into the house, began putting his altar ornaments into his satchel, saying, "I must hurry back to my people."

"Lola, Father," began Cristobal, holding his hat in one hand, and looking first down, then up at the priest's face: "How is she?"

"Well again, Cristobal," he replied. "She is beginning already to be comforted."

They went together into the porch.

"You will—" The eager black eyes gazed beseechingly; "you will let her come with me?"

The priest set down his satchel carefully on the floor before he turned upon him. Frowning sternly, he shook his reproving head.

"No, Cristobal; no. And do you not understand why perfectly? I told you day before yesterday that you could not enjoy the fruit of your crime, before you had repented of it. And today I find you even less repentant than then. No, think of your soul before you think of Lola; it would be hideous now. I will not have you marry her. For the present forget her."

Speechless under the rebuke until this point, Cristobal shook his head, and with his fervent eyes fixed on the priest, said in a low voice: "No, Father."

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Father Maria de Jesus looked at him contemplatively, and then said: "Well, I will not have you marry her now. I tell you what to do. Go back into Las Animas, and lead a good life; go to mass every Sunday and holy-day, fast every fast-day, say your prayers regularly and do whatever works of charity you can. Try, try, to get the sin out of your heart, and to feel sorry. I should not dare to absolve you now; but when you are repentant, confess to a priest, and he will do so. Pray continually for the soul of Anunciato; I will say a mass for him; and when you hear of any indulgence to be had, work and pray until you have earned it, and then ask God to apply it to the soul of the man you have murdered." He paused.

"And Lola, Father—" insisted Cristobal: "When—I did it for her."

The priest gave him a final glance, calm and cold with scorn: "Am I here," he said, "to be a marriage-maker? No; to care for souls. Go and do as I bade you."

He picked up his satchel, untied and mounted his donkey, and rode ambling away, all without another look at Cristobal.

He, standing there in the porch, gazed for a long time after him, his expression a mingling of reverence and defiance. Finally he sighed, set his mouth firm, and mounting his horse, galloped away eastward towards Las Animas county.

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VII

PASCO AND PAEZ

ON THE Monday Dolores had recovered from her hysteria. After a breakfast of bacon and potatoes, Panchita, who was the dressmaker of San Rafael, told her that she would be expected to help with the sewing. The two women, one young, dark, and pretty, the other elderly, fat, and contented-looking, each with her blue stint, sat on a bench in the square brown room. Through the open door they could see into the porch and beyond, and could hear the swishing of Pasco's work as village dyer.

They were hardly well begun, when a shrill voice outside was heard saying "God bless you," to Pasco; and the gaunt straight form of Oestocris slid in.

"God be with you, Panchita," she said, making the sign of the cross before an orange-colored picture of Our Lady of Santa Fe; "and with you, too—What is her name?"

"Dolores. Lola we call her."

"And you, too, Dolores. I didn't see you at mass yesterday, nor at vespers either."

"Her sister has just died," Panchita hastened to explain, "and the Father excused her."

"When any one dies," the withered old woman

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began severely to Dolores, "the best place to comfort yourself is in church. The only place, too, where the Lord will show you, if you pray enough—show you the person you have lost, dressed in gold and sitting on the right of Our Blessed Lady, playing on a harp. I saw my husband like that; but only when I was in the church; and the more candles there were, the better I saw him through the light."

Dolores stared at her with wide eyes; but at the end of this speech, the old creature turning to Panchita, said: "I have come to get me a gown."

Seeing their backs turned, the girl with her sewing, quietly slipped out into the porch. Pasco was sitting on the ground, his shoulders to the wall, his legs wide apart embracing a tub nearly full of blue liquid in which were big bubbles of bloated cloth. These he stirred round and poked with a stick. There was a curious smooth smell from the tub.

Before sitting on the bench Dolores tried to make out her own house in the valley below; but search as she might, it was only one continuous yellow reach with heat twinkling up all over it.

Sitting down, she began to turn a hem, swinging one bare foot the while. At last she looked at Pasco. Her eyes met his; but he at once turned away his head and stared into the distance. Dolores smiled. She regarded his blue

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hands and arms, shrunken with the wet, and his calm handsome face. As long as she examined him he kept his eyes turned away; and all the time went on swishing and swashing about in the dye-stuff.

Finally she said: "Have you ever been down in the Valley?"

He turned his big straightforward eyes toward her and faced her, impassive enough. He nodded in response.

"To Antonito?"

Keeping his eyes fixed on her, again he nodded.

"To Conejos?"

Another nod.

"La Jara?"

Still he nodded, slowly and seriously.

"Ephraim and Manassa?"

This time he shook his head.

"Neither have I," said Dolores: "Ever been out of the Valley?"

He made the same negative reply.

"Neither have I," she said again.

She had laid her sewing on her knee. Now she took it up again, and as she stuck her needle into her hem, she began to laugh. She laughed right gaily; and when she stopped and looked at Pasco, he had his lips parted in a sympathetic smile that showed all his strong white teeth. At that she laughed again.

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When, after sewing quickly a while, she lifted her head once more and looked at Pasco, who was wringing out a thick twist of cloth, he had his eyes still on her.

"I'm sorry I came to this house to live," said Dolores, with a little sigh.

His eyes interrogated, but she wouldn't see their meaning and went on diligently sewing. Ultimately he said, "Why?"

She replied readily: "I have an idea you dislike girls."

Pasco shook his head with vehemence and added: "No, I do like them."

"Do you like having me here?"

He gravely nodded.

Though Dolores gave him an encouraging smile, he only continued regarding her fixedly with his big calm eyes. So with a toss of her head, she looked away and went on with her hem.

At the end of it, she stood up on her bare feet. Pasco followed her every movement with his eyes, but she paid no more attention to him. Laying her sewing down on the bench, and then stepping tentatively out into the open sunshine, she started off toward the church. She had the swaying, self-reliant, egotistical gait of the graceful Spanish woman.

Across the road in a field where one of the gaunt black crosses was, she could see a dozen

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dark figures working. In the shady porch of the first house she passed, a naked little girl stood gazing at her. Some one was evidently cooking inside, to judge from the pungent odor of a pine fire.

At the next house sat a young man, whose black hair fell about his face as he bent over something he seemed to be mending. She halted and stared at him. Under this influence he soon raised his head, and straightening up gave her a fair return of interest. As soon as his eyes caught hers, Dolores glanced away. As she hesitated, a young woman in a red waist who was in the porch of the house still beyond, caught her attention. Dolores at once faced about and walked slowly to the church.

As she found the door open, she went in. Nobody was there. She noticed the bell-rope hanging near the altar and the silver candle-sticks standing forth on her white mantilla. Without noticing the sacred pictures, she made an obeisance before the huge wax Christ on his cross over the altar, made the sign of the cross, and kneeled on the earthen floor.

The great sunshine pouring in through the wide door, brightened every corner of the chapel. There was a faint smell of stale incense. As she prayed, Dolores watched the dust dancing in one straight shaft of light that came through the bell-rope hole and struck the front of the altar.

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Before long she was aware of somebody's coming into the church. Out of the tail of her eye, she saw Father Chucho, who, without paying any attention to her, after saluting the altar, stepped into the chancel. His brown robes were pale with white dust. Opening a little satchel which he carried, he began to take things out of it, and to put them on the altar. In a moment she rose from her knees and went towards him. After setting the crucifix in place, he turned to her. "Ah, Lola," he said cheerily, "I am glad to see you looking so well. The Blessed Virgin has comforted you already. I have just come up from the Valley, from burying your sister. If I had known—I might have taken you with me; but it is just as well. The Lord will hear your prayers here as well as by the grave. May he be merciful to her!" He mused a minute, and then said, smiling: "Everyone seems to be out in the fields working. My sermon has had an effect. Even old Muhammah, my housekeeper, insisted on taking a rake and going across the road there. She said the Lord's harvest must be made. And so it must; so it must. I shall go over there myself soon: but the Lord's altar must be kept clean, too, and if all the women till the fields— By the way, didn't Panchita give you any task? We all labor together, for the glory of God."

"Yes," replied Dolores, "I did do some sewing, but I came up here to pray a little while."

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"Ah, yes, for your sister, I suppose. God save all Catholic souls—" and he made the sign of the cross.

"No," Dolores said candidly, imitating his gesture; "I wasn't praying for her."

"No? Well, I will say a mass for her tomorrow in return for this beautiful altar cloth you've given us. Indeed, I'll say several masses," he considered, feeling the lace, "for your kindness. But for whom were you praying?"

"For Pasco," replied Dolores.

"For Pasco, Lola! Oh, I see; you were asking San Rafael to implore God to choose him, I'm sure. Or perhaps you asked it of Our Lady of Sorrows. She is your Saint, isn't she?"

"To choose Pasco?" queried the girl.

"Yes; to put His sacred mark on him and set him apart for the blessed role in our festival. You know in a day or two we are going to ask God to set His sign upon the man He selects."

Dolores, who had not heard yesterday's sermon stared at the priest.

"I wish with all my heart," mused he, "that He would vouchsafe to send us the sign of the tongue of fire, which He set upon the heads of the twelve at Pentecost. But He has not granted that to us since San Rafael himself was crucified, and I hardly dare to hope—so that I won't raise their—" then he remembered Dolores; "O Lola," he said to the girl, who still had

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her astonished eyes on him; "I will give you a task to do, too, for the love of Jesus. Panchita can spare you. Take this altar-cloth you have bestowed on San Rafael and go down to the river and wash it. It has got a little dirty, bringing it here—" he was folding it as he spoke; "Neetasta will show you the pool where the women wash. I saw her as I came in, talking to Paez."

"Who is Neetasta?" asked Dolores, taking the white roll carefully.

"Fanita is the name I christened her, but we call her Neetasta; she lives in the house next to mine."

"Does she wear a red waist?" demanded Dolores.

"Yes, I believe so," the Father answered, wrinkling his brow.

Dolores flushed.

"Who is Paez?" she asked, with a harder ring in her voice.

"He is the son of old Oestocris. He lives in the next house to Fanita."

"Is he an Indian?" asked the girl.

"An Indian?"

"His mother is."

"She is a good Catholic, Lola," he said.

"Pasco can show me where the pool is," said Dolores; and she turned and walked out.

Though she would not look directly at the

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porch where the very dark young man sat mending something, she could see well enough that the girl in the red waist was standing there, arms akimbo, talking to him. She could even hear the sound of their voices. The talking ceased abruptly when she appeared. Putting her head higher, Dolores swung off in her finest strut, down towards Panchita's.

She came round the corner of the house so suddenly that Pasco, still sitting in the same attitude, stirring the blue mess in the tub between his legs, looked up with almost a start.

"Pasco," gasped the girl, "did you dye that red waist that girl up there wears?"

Pasco nodded.

"Well, I want you to make me a yellow one, will you? A whole gown, will you?"

"Yes," said Pasco.

"Come and show me the pool where they wash things."

He got his legs from round the tub and stiffly pulled himself up. Then he stretched himself as thoroughly and languidly as a cat; yawned, too. Then he took up a wrung-out blue twist that lay beside the tub, and they started.

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VIII

PRIDE OF BIRTH

THE opportunity for Dolores to slip out of the dress-making room had been the arrival of Oestocris. The old half-breed woman had made some remark about needing a gown; but on being aware that the girl was gone, she muttered something about making her old skirt do. Her sharp ears having caught the fresh tones of Dolores's voice outside, Oestocris turned summarily upon Panchita, demanding: "Why was that girl sent here to you?"

Panchita, with a slight gasp, replied: "Father Chucho brought her here and told me to keep her."

"Why did he choose your house?" asked the other cuttingly.

"It's bigger than most," said Panchita placatingly.

"It's no bigger than mine."

"No," admitted the fat woman; adding in a lower tone; "I have my doubts if she's a very good Catholic."

Oestocris, silenced for a moment, tightened her thin dark lips, nodding significantly.

"Then she ought to have been sent to me,"

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she suddenly declared. "But I know why it was. The Father considered Paez."

"Paez?"

"Yes; he's the handsomest boy in San Rafael."

"I don't know that he is," replied Panchita hotly.

"He's the most angelic boy in the whole Valley," insisted the old woman.

Though Panchita ventured no more protest, her pale eyes were unwontedly fiery.

Oestocris, nodding her white head sharply, grunted.

"That he is," she said, putting her worn hands on her knees to rise.

"I thought Paez was going to marry Fanita."

"So I thought, too," admitted Oestocris; "but God's will be done;" she crossed herself and added proudly. "He is going to be the Christ."

"Paez!" exclaimed Panchita.

"My son Paez."

"The cross-bearer! How do you know? Did Father Chucho tell you?"

"He didn't need to. Our Lady told me."

While Panchita gazed at her breathless, the gaunt old creature got up, smoothing back her straight white hair with one bony hand; and with a hideous smile at her, went out as noiselessly as she had come in.

After an instant of astonished quietude, Pan-

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chita waddled after her. But Pasco was alone in the porch.

"Pasco," panted his mother, looking from his blue hands to his dark head; "you be careful of that girl Lola. I'm afraid she isn't a very good Catholic. But—but a cow could see that you are handsomer than that—and I know that's not why Father Chucho put her—anyway, you be careful. Where is she now?"

"In the church," said Pasco.

"Well, that's a good sign. You pray for her," and she went in again without waiting for an answer.

Meanwhile, Dolores after having seen Paez and Fanita in their respective porches, and having stared at the one and ignored the other, had, as Pasco said, gone into the church. As soon as she had disappeared, Fanita hurried from the shade of her own porch over to where Paez sat mending his rake. As he raised his head, his straight black locks fell down about his ears and neck. Though he had high cheek bones and an Indian's stern nose, his eyes were singularly soft and his mouth girlish.

"Is that the new girl?" asked Fanita, facing him.

"I suppose it is."

"Is she pretty?"

"You could see as well as I could," he replied; "she wasn't near enough."

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"Well, I know she isn't," said Fanita decidedly.

Paez grunted.

"Don't grunt. Do you think she is?"

"I don't know anything about it," he said.

"What do you think, Paez? You can think," she insisted pettishly.

"I am sure she isn't as pretty as you," said Paez, looking up and smiling.

"I don't like her," said the girl, not entirely mollified.

"You're not jealous, are you?" he asked.

"Of what? You don't know her."

"On account of Pasco, I mean. She lives down there."

"Oh, you funny boy! What do I care about Pasco?" she laughed; and with one hand straightened the ruffle of her red waist. "Pasco will never say a word to her anyway. That's the reason I chose you," she added archly. "You are not dumb."

"Was that the only reason?" asked Paez tenderly.

With a quick glance of sympathy she stretched out her hand. Taking it in his, he squeezed it gently.

"Don't be jealous," he said.

Fanita drew her hand away.

"Of her!" she exclaimed.

She made a little face, and put her hands de-

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fiantly on her hips. It was at this moment that Dolores came out of the church. Paez saw her at once. His sweetheart, understanding his expression, glanced contemptuously over her shoulder.

"Well, this is finished," Paez said, getting up and pushing back his long hair.

"Where are you going?" asked Fanita.

"Out into the fields," he pointed across the road.

The girl returned to her house; and Paez, his rake over his shoulder, watched till she disappeared inside; then changing his course, he followed down the steep incline in the direction Dolores had gone.

In that part of the settlement and near the river there was one field hemmed in by some low water-loving trees. Thither he followed a little behind Dolores and Pasco. When he entered the empty field, instead of falling to work, he watched the two others from behind the willow screen. He saw Dolores, after kneeling beside the washing-stone, roll up her sleeves and plunge her arms into the river, and he saw Pasco go back some distance and begin unrolling his dyed goods and spreading them on the sand to dry. Then Paez started towards the washing pool. When she heard him coming Dolores turned her head and smiled at him over her shoulder. Before she spoke, she glanced round over her other

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shoulder to see how far away Pasco was from them. He seemed to be engrossed in his work. So she sat back on her heels, letting the heap of wet lace lie on the flat stone, and said: "Did you ever see me when you were down in the plain?"

"No, I never did," Paez, leaning on his rake, with his eyes fixed on her, shook his head.

"Sit down," said Dolores, patting the grass beside her with her wet hand. "It's nice and shady here, and you ought to rest before you work. It's so hot, too. Besides we ought to get acquainted."

Paez, with an acquiescent smile, laid down the rake and sat beside her.

The girl, leaning forward once more, took the roll of lace, and having untwisted it, dipped it again into the running water, letting her brown arms sink in up to the elbows.

"How do you know you never saw me?" she pursued airily, as she trailed the flimsy whiteness from side to side through the ripples. "You might have forgotten."

"No, I shouldn't," he replied stoutly; "I should have always remembered you."

"Why?" she wished to know.

"Why, because you are so pretty, I suppose."

She gave a side glance, meant for him to catch. "Do you think I am so very pretty?" She drew out the last word as if hesitating. "As

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pretty as—" she stopped. "I know you don't, though."

"Yes, I do, too," he said; "prettier."

"Who, then?" Dolores demanded, straightening up again and turning on him.

"You know who." She shook her head smiling. "Yes, you do. Well, Fanita."

The girl gave him a piercing look, full of meaning; and then said artlessly: "You are her lover, aren't you? You oughn't to say such things. Suppose I should tell her."

Paez looked at her uncomfortably.

"Well, never mind. I won't. But I know you are. Pasco told me so."

She leaned over to her task, and for some minutes the splashing she made was the only sound. At last, sitting up again, she raised her eyebrows at him knowingly, and with her teeth on her lower lip smiled at him in mock reproval, shaking her head. But she said nothing. As she carefully picked apart the soaked folds of the lace, and laid it out smoothly on the stone, the monotonous gurgle of the water was the only break in the morning stillness. The sunlight sifted in upon them through the trees.

Finally Paez said in a recriminatory tone: "Didn't you have any lovers down there?"

Dolores laughed. "Yes, I had two."

"Where are they now?"

"One of them killed the other; and now he's

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over in Las Animas county waiting for me to come."

"Are you going?"

"I don't know," replied Dolores carelessly. "I might. You know I ought to marry some one with Spanish blood—the most Spanish I can get."

"My father was Mexican," said Paez feebly.

"Castilian, I mean," she explained; "my grandfather was Castilian. He married a Mexican woman. But his father was a prince."

Paez stared at her silently.

"Yes. He was brother of the King of Spain, and he was my great-grandfather."

Paez wonderingly grunted.

"Yes," she went on, settling back comfortably on her heels, and looking past Paez; "and he lived in Spain, somewhere, where the King lives. That was a long while ago, when they had a different King from the one now, I suppose, or else he must be terribly old. My grandfather was terribly old, and he's dead. He lived in a palace, the prince did. We used to have a silver medal he gave my grandfather's mother—with the King's head on it. He never came away from Spain. But she came to Mexico with her baby. I guess she died there. She used to be a washerwoman at first," Dolores rambled on; "but I don't know whether she would have wanted to be one after she lived in a palace. I

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believe it was the King himself who sent her to Mexico." The girl paused. "So you see," she added, "I ought to marry some one just as Spanish as I can find."

After a moment, as she began carefully to take up the lace from the rock, Paez said: "Well, I hope you won't go to Las Animas, anyway."

"Do you want me to stay here?" she asked naïvely, holding a hand to him to help her up from her knees.

"Yes," said Paez fervently, "I do."

"Very much?" and she looked at him from under her brows.

"Yes, very much."

"Well, I'll see how I like it here," she answered; and turning towards Pasco, who was still a little distance away, sitting now on the grass among his strips of blue stretched there to dry, and who had his calm eyes fixed upon them, "I must go spread this in the sun. You go and work now," and she gave him a sudden push, which had almost upset him into the stream. At that she laughed, as she strutted away.

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IX

A SIGN IN THE SKY

AFTER vespers, on the Friday Heaven's choice of him who should become the Christ was to be made, the whole of San Rafael, including Dolores, was gathered in high time at the church door; and even after Father Maria de Jesus had passed in through the yielding crowd, they lingered, while he might robe, wondering how the choice was to be indicated.

"I believe he is going to be transfigured," declared Oestocris.

Already she had declared that several times, each time looking pointedly at her son Paez, with an expression in her eyes as if she already saw his face shine as the sun and his raiment white as the light.

"No," objected Cristoké unsympathetically, "there won't be any transfiguration today. If there is any, it will come later, after the fast has commenced. I don't feel as if anything of that kind was going to happen today."

"But who do you think it will be, Cristoké?" asked one dark, gaping youth.

"Who do you think it will be?" asked Panchita at the same time.

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They all spoke subduedly, as people who were about to be put to a test.

"I trust that Our Lady of Continual Blessing will grant my prayers. I have said five hundred rosaries to her. And I am old enough to die," answered Cristoké solemnly.

"But why would he die?" asked Dolores of the woman next her. "What do you do to the one that is chosen?'

She had not heard the sermon; and down in the Valley only rumors of the cross-bearers' festival had reached her. But as she asked, they began to push into the church, and she had no answer.

Cristoké's was the one white head among the many dark, shiny polls of the men on the right. Underneath his seat on the back bench (where he saw everyone, and everyone would have to turn to see him), his yellow dog lay on the dirt floor. When there was a pause he could be heard, now beating with his tail on the ground, now rhythmically snoring.

The congregation sang the responses in Latin. Only one or two could read, but the priest had taught them by heart. They were so well practiced in the beautiful monotony of plain chant, that their strong voices, blending harmoniously, holding well the long notes, rose and fell in unison. The litanies in Spanish everyone knew. This afternoon they said one after another of

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them, until there was no one there who didn't feel so heartily the appeals to San Rafael, to all the Saints, to Our Lady of Santa Fe, and Our Lady of Perpetual Succor, to the Blessed Spirit, and to Christ Himself, that his feelings were not shining out from his black eyes, at the last note, when Father Maria de Jesus turned with dignity towards the altar. Kneeling on the step he reached out his arms and rested his hands on the altar's edge as he prayed. The Penitentes were all on their knees; every eye was fixed on the white-robed figure. When they saw, after some space of silence, a slight movement of his cope, they made the sign of the cross. Then most of them took their rosaries; and the women sinking back on their heels, leaned against the benches. Everyone said his beads, while the Father in his clear, deep voice intoned the prayers.

The little acolyte, whose brown feet peeped from under his mussed scarlet cassock, standing on the Gospel side, with both hands solemnly and continuously swung back and forth a brass censer on three brass chains. Each time the censer swung downward the smoke slipped out in a gulp, till little by little, there gathered a thin gray cloud, through which the twinkling rows of candles and the wax Christ above them showed dimmer and dimmer; while the heavy

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rich odor searched into every corner of the little church.

In words of entreaty, but with a note in his strong voice of the consciousness of right-doing, the priest prayed as volubly as if he were not extemporizing. "O Lord," he began, "we entreat Thee to pour out the fruitful blessing of Heaven upon the pious enterprise about to be begun by a few of us, Thy children, to the honor of Thy good Saint the Archangel San Rafael, and in memory of the most sacred Passion of Thy Son our Lord. We, O Father, as followers of Christ are anxious, for the glory of the Holy Catholic Church and for the everlasting love of God and of His Immaculate Mother, to follow Him to eternal bliss before Thy throne, through the same path that He in His last days taught men to tread.

"We beseech thee, O Holy San Rafael, Archangel thrice blessed, to send us down a sign which shall designate who among us is worthiest in the sight of God, of that supreme and mystic honor of receiving the sacred Stigmata, emblem of the ever-sacred Passion.

"Who among us," he continued, "most deserves the marks in his soles and in his palms, the wound on his breast, the crown of thorns, and the blissful agony and bloody sweat? Tell us, we beseech thee, O Patron Father!"

After a moment the kneeling Penitentes mur-

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mured in chorus, "Tell us, we beseech thee, O Patron Father!"

Several of them looked round where old Cristoké kneeled. His forehead was wet with beads of excitement, his old eyes, fiery again, were fixed above the head of the white figure in the incense smoke.

"O Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, we conjure thee, for thy Son's sake, to send us a sign of the Heavenly will."

And all the Penitentes responded:

"We beseech thee, O Holy Mother."

"O Little Infant Jesus," the pleading voice went on, "tell us, we beseech Thee, who among us is worthy."

And as he paused, the Penitentes burst out all together in the heartfelt response:

"We beseech Thee, O Little Infant Jesus."

"As Thou sentest down Thy spirit in tongues of fire upon the Twelve, to be a sign to all men, so do we beg Thee to vouchsafe us a sign to-day, O Eternal Father."

At the end of this cry to God the Father the pleading voice stopped as if exhausted, and the Penitentes murmured "Amen!"

The church was full of the incense smoke. All that could be seen of the two figures in the chancel was two blurs, one red, one white. The white one remained immovable in front of the vaguely twinkling candles of the altar.

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For some time there was no sound. The dark figures in the gray smoke kneeled as immovable as the priest. The heavy smell of the incense was so disseminated as to be no longer noticeable. The only movement that could be felt in the silence was the minute click of prayer-beads. Then the breathing of so many tense figures began to be heard. One of the benches creaked. And for the moment after, the silence seemed more intense than ever. But there was no sound that could be thought supernatural. A gentle purring noise succeeded—very monotonous, and so gradual and natural that it might be the mere throbbing of the silence.

Of a sudden there came a nervous little scratching and a quick bark.

There was a general start among the congregation. The barking ceased. Some one was evidently choking the dog. This, however, was not Cristoké, its master, for at this moment he began praying aloud.

This second disturbance was stopped as suddenly as it had arisen by the voice of Father Maria de Jesus: "Look, look! God is good to us!"

Seeing him through the mist of incense, standing on the chancel edge, facing them, his arms stretched out toward the door behind them, they all turned. There was a general scuffling to feet and murmurs of surprise.

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It was raining. The purring sound could now be plainly heard, both on the roof above and on the ground outside. There was a cooler feeling in the air and through the doorway the rain could be seen falling steadily—a fresher, moister gray than the cloying atmosphere of the church.

"God is pleased with our efforts," declared the priest; "since we have begun the preparation for our sacrifice by cultivating our fields, he sends us rain to show his pleasure as well as to aid us."

They all stood gazing into the rain; but there was no expression of responsive feeling. Clearly this sign was not the sign that had been asked.

The priest himself, standing quite still, looked over the heads of his people, his lips moving in prayer. As the rain lightened and the smoke inside began to settle, he could distinguish far away in the east the shapes of the Sangre de Cristo mountains—a long waving line on the horizon, rising at one end to the superb mass of Blanca. Through the last scattering drops, the oblique sunshine, purplish and misty, could be seen far down the Valley. The violet haze of evening was settling over the lowlands. Above the mountains, against the coolest blue sky seen for weeks there were clouds. As he looked, mountains and clouds alike began to be pink with the reflection of the setting sun. The pink

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growing rosy, flushed up into the sky; deeper and richer it warmed until finally it blazed like red fire on the crest of the mountains.

"There, Penitentes!" cried the priest, "the Lord has sent us another token. There is the Sangre de Cristo, the very blood of Christ spilt for our sins."

He made a sign to the scarlet acolyte, who caught hold of the rope hanging near, and in a moment the church bell was clanging above their heads.

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X

DOLORES WAITS

EVEN in the rainy season it is necessary to irrigate the San Luis Valley; and as no one was yet quite sure whether the rainy season had begun or whether the afternoon's shower had been an isolated phenomenon, the work begun on the disused ditches was to be prosecuted.

In any case, though no one doubted that the rainfall indicated the heavenly approval of their labors, yet it was not the response so anxiously expected. Father Chucho could give no satisfactory answer as to what must next be done. He was not decided himself; and at all events a few days' waiting would give opportunity for any divine message that might be individually vouchsafed. They need not so soon fall back on a choice by ordinary human means.

The afternoon's meeting was the inevitable topic of the evening's conversation. A company of a dozen or so was gathered in the house of Oestocris to discuss it under the leadership of that holy woman. As they sat solemnly confabulating in the dark, it was easy for Paez to slip out unnoticed, and taking up his spade, to set forth under the moonlight towards the river.

The nearly full moon swam high in a cloud-

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less black heaven. So it was fairly light. Paez paused opposite the open door of Panchita's house. By the light inside he could catch sight of one or two people. He strained his eyes for some time before a dark form coming out into the night, approached him.

"Is that you, Lola?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Dolores.

"How did you know I was here?"

"I saw you. Panchita is asleep and Pasco didn't say anything. So I came out to see you. Where are you going?"

"Down by the river."

"I will come, too," said Dolores, looking up into his face.

Though Pasco may not have said anything, yet as they started off through the large, still night, they saw him come out and, shading his eyes with his hand, look around. When he saw them, he stood gazing at them a moment or two, then turned and went in again.

"I don't care," said Dolores, with a little gurgle of laughter; "I like you better."

"What are you going to do?" she asked, when they were down under the stunted trees, where they could feel grass beneath their bare feet and hear the little river's murmur.

"I came out to work on the ditch," Paez said doubtfully.

"Well, sit down and rest awhile," she coaxed.

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"There's an awfully good place here, where you can reach down and dabble your hands in the water. See!" and she sat and made room for him beside her.

"Yes, I know this place," he answered, throwing himself down on the grass; "how did you find it?"

"Oh, I discovered it myself."

In the moonlight that filtered in between the trees he could make out her face just enough to see her smile. He lay with his head propped on his hands, staring up at her.

Dolores distractedly plucked up three or four little bunches of grass, and threw them at him. He shook his head to get the grass off his face.

"Don't go away, will you?" he said to her in a low voice.

"Oh, I don't know yet whether I shall or not," she answered shrilly, with a wilful toss of her head; "I don't like it so very much here, that I should stay forever."

"You don't like it?" repeated Paez sorrowfully.

"No, I don't; why should I? Down there I always had some one who was fond of me, and here—well, Pasco is as—as wooden as a statue in a church—and—"

"I am fond of you, Lola!" he said fervidly.

"Ho!" laughed Lola; "you've got that girl with the Indian name. You're always hanging around her. I don't like her, not a bit."

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"No, I'm not, Lola," he insisted; "you haven't been here very long, and I—I liked her pretty well before you came. But I don't hang around her now any more than I can help."

"That's the trouble with you," she went on, bitterly reproachful; "you're so helpless; you're afraid of your mother; you're afraid of Fanita; you're afraid of everything. I can see that."

"No, no," he protested, "I'm not; I'm not afraid of Fanita."

Dolores was silent for a time. Again plucking up handfuls of grass, this time by the roots, she flung them now into the water, angrily, and stared out with fixed eyes upon the ripples floating along one after another in the moonlight. Finally she turned again to the patient Paez, and asked in her natural voice, caressingly: "Do you care more for me than you do for her?"

"Yes," said Paez, scarcely above a breath.

"If you did," mused the girl aloud, "and if she wasn't here, there might be some good of my staying. Though I don't see what difference it makes if she is here, if you like me better."

"I do," he said again.

"I'm not so sure," said Dolores, with a tinge of cynicism; "and besides, suppose they should choose you for the Christ."

Paez at first made no reply.

"Hm?" Dolores insisted on an answer.

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"I don't think they will," said Paez; "there are plenty of others."

"Yes; there's Pasco. He'd make a lovely one," she laughed mockingly.

Paez laughed too, but as if merely because she was laughing.

"You will stay, Lola?" he said again.

She looked where she could see his eyes fixed on her, the whites shining in the stray moonbeams.

"They used to be so good to me down there."

"I will be good to you, Lola."

"I had two lovers down there," she argued reminiscently.

"Why do you want two, Lola?" he said. "One's enough; you can only marry one."

"If I stay, you would have two," she suggested.

"No, Lola," he persisted with fervor; "don't say that. Only you."

"Well," she considered seriously, "I know if I go, she will get you, unless—unless you are the Christ."

"Then you won't go," he sat up and took her hand in one of his.

"No, I won't," she said, in a voice of determination.

He squeezed her hand with the warmth of feeling; but her return of the pressure spoke, though not to him, more of the strength of fixed decision.

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XI

HE COMES AND GOES

IT WAS this very same night that Cristobal came riding along in the moonlight towards San Rafael. He wore his new light checked suit, which made him a rather conspicuous object; and as he particularly wished not to be generally seen, he dismounted where the plain begins to rise toward the Penitente village, and going off the road into the little clump of woods by the river, he tied his horse to a tree there. A few minutes earlier he might have heard the voices of Dolores and Paez; but by this time they had gone up again to the settlement.

Slowly and cautiously he made his way up the hill, keeping a keen lookout, and stopping as soon as he came near to the first light, which was in the house of Panchita. He could not see Dolores sitting alone there in the dark of the porch. While he hesitated as to what his next move should be, he saw the first living being that had yet been visible, in the quiet place. It was a woman moving rather stealthily across the open; and taking the chance that some resemblance in height and gait afforded him, he went a step or two nearer, and with his hands to his mouth trumpetwise, called gently, "Lola!"

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The figure abruptly halted.

"Lola!" he called again in the same tone. Though she had started to move on again, she now apparently changed her mind, and turned towards him.

He waited, withdrawing indeed a little farther into the shadow. As she came to him, he again exclaimed, "Lola," and then realizing his mistake, said, "Oh, you are not Lola," at the same instant that Fanita peering at him asked: "Who are you?"

"I am Cristobal," he said. "Is Lola here? I want to speak to her."

"Lola?" she repeated. She was now close to him.

"Yes," he insisted in low tones; "Dolores. Isn't she here? Father Chucho brought her up here."

"She is here," answered the girl in a hard sharp voice; and then suddenly changing her tone, repeated in her suavest way, "Yes, she is here."

Neither of them, where they stood, could see, in the porch of Panchita's house Dolores leaning against a post, stretching her head toward them in the effort to hear what they were saying.

"Listen," said the man impressively; "will you tell her I am here? Cristobal; and promise not to tell any one else. I thought you were she."

Fanita looked at him.

"Who are you?" she demanded again.

"Cristobal," he insisted; "I am her lover. I

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am come to take her away. Father Chucho would not let me have her, and so I don't want him to know. But you will help me, won't you?"

He laid a supplicating hand upon her arm.

"You won't tell any one. You are young yourself. You have a lover probably yourself. You will help us."

"Yes," said the girl, "I will fetch her. But look, first—" she cast a nervous glance over her shoulder, and then went on: "Let me tell you. Are you sure she will go?"

"Oh, yes," and she could see his teeth, white in the moonlight, as he smiled in assurance. "I am her lover. She will come. Father Chucho would not let her before. That is why."

"Yes," said the girl; "but—" and she lowered her voice almost to a whisper, and in her turn put her hand on his arm, "she has another lover here."

She could feel him start at this intelligence. Looking eagerly into his set face—for he knew he must be quiet there—she sighed, nodding her head in asseveration. "Yes," she repeated; "and she might want to stay and marry him."

"No, no," he protested; "she will marry me. Lola! Anunciato is dead; and she promised."

In a moment the girl burst forth again, speaking with earnestness that betrayed her utmost feeling: "Take her away. Make her go with you."

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"Ah," said Cristobal in a long exclamation of comprehension, "he is your lover."

Fanita looked down and said nothing.

"I will make her go," he said with an energy meant more to reassure himself than her. "Go find her. Tell her I am here."

"She shall not have him," cried the girl, raising her voice, with the vehemence of her passion.

"Sh—h," warned Cristobal, glancing behind her.

She dropped her voice again, declaring, "I will have him crucified sooner."

Even in the midst of his own agitation the phrase struck Cristobal. He looked questioningly at her; and presently nodding, remarked: "Oh, yes. You are the Penitentes. And you do it? You will do it this fall again?"

"I will—sooner!" repeated Fanita, taking the question to herself. "It is time almost to choose the Christ."

"Go, go," Cristobal hurriedly exclaimed; "somebody might see me. I will take her away. You will not need to—"

The girl with a stately turn, started off in silence towards the house of Panchita. Following her with his eyes he saw another girl come out of the porch.

Dolores, on her part, though she had not been positive that she recognized her old lover in this light-suited person, and was not near enough to

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hear even the sound of his voice, had yet watched him closely during his conversation with Fanita; and when at the end she saw this girl, who had never yet spoken to her, turn and come towards the house, Dolores slipped through the shadow and suddenly appeared, as if she had just come from inside. She left the porch and went toward Fanita, who coming straight to her said, constrainedly: "He wants to see you. Go over there."

She waved her arm towards the motionless gray figure.

"Who is it?" asked Dolores in a cold, careless manner.

"He has come to take you away. It is Cristobal."

Dolores looked at her closely, trying to read her face in the wan light. Then with a sneer, "Aren't you glad?" she said icily, and strutted away.

"Who are you? Cristobal!" she called softly but indifferently, as she approached. When a yard or two from him, she stopped short, set her hands on her hips, and laid back her head in a laugh. "Well, where did you get those clothes?" she demanded, ceasing to laugh as suddenly as she had begun. "I never should have known you. And your mustache gone, too! Ugh! You looked horrid without it."

He slid a step or two nearer, and in low tones

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into her ear began: "It was all only for you, everything——" When she interrupted by turning abruptly from him.

He ended his sentence in a half-swallowed Spanish oath.

Standing with her back to Cristobal, "Look here, you girl; whatever your name is," Dolores called to Fanita, who was plainly to be seen hovering about not far away. "You go home. Go away and don't be listening to us."

She laughed as she saw how swiftly the dark figure turned and hurried away towards the houses. Giving her attention once more to Cristobal, she coolly demanded: "What was she telling you about me?"

He was not ready with an answer.

"Oh, I know she was," the girl said. "What else could you have been talking so long about? Unless you were making love to her——"

"Lola!" he exclaimed with reproach. "You know I came here only for you, only because I love you. That is why I put on these clothes and shaved my face to look like a woman, all for you, for a disguise so I could stay around near here safely, and be able to come up here and get you again. And now I've come."

Dolores smothered a yawn; she made no answer.

"I've come all the way over from Janoso, over by Stamford. I've been living over there. But

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I can't stop thinking of you, Lola; so I have come to get you. It is dangerous, and I have to come at night. You will come with me, won't you?"

As she stood there calmly with her arms folded, she fell to patting her elbows with her hands in the manner of one who is bored; and looked around in the air aimlessly.

"Lola, I shot him for your sake. That is why all the priests refuse to forgive me, and say I will go to hell, because I am unrepentant, because I did it for you. That is why I ride around here in the Valley in danger of my life; for you."

He paused: "Lola!" desperately; "you promised!"

Yet she made no answer.

He put his hand on her shoulder and shook her gently,—though less gently than he thought. She squirmed away from him.

"Lola," he said, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing," said Dolores.

"You don't care for me now any more?"

"Not when you're cross."

"No, Lola, I'm not cross," he said coaxingly, "I won't be cross. I love you too much. I was always good to you, wasn't I? Come away from these people that crucify. It is no good place for you. Won't you?"

Again a pause, and again he said: "You promised."

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"I don't remember any promise," she said hurriedly and decisively; "I only remember I did say I would never marry a murderer."

He fell back from her a step, and said, with his voice trembling, "You have a lover here!"

"She told you that!" said the girl simply, with a shrug.

"Is it true?"

"How can I help who is my lover?" she demanded testily.

"You can; you——"

"Do you own me?" she went on, interrupting him angrily. "Suppose I have a lover here; does it hurt you? I had two before, didn't I? I can't help it how many I have; and it seems to worry you and that girl much more than it does me." She laughed mockingly.

Cristobal, still controlling himself, still imploring, asked: "Are you going to marry him, Lola?"

"I won't marry him unless I want to," she declared. "But I won't let him be crucified, either."

"Then come with me and we won't let him be crucified."

"Ho! How can you help it?" she scoffed.

"I can! I can!" he insisted earnestly. "I know how I can."

"And then he would marry her," considered Dolores. "Ah, I hate her!"

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UNIV. OF

"Lola, come; you love him more than me?"

She made no answer.

"Do you?"

Still no answer.

"Lola!"

"Oh, go away!" she cried impatiently, "I am not going with you; and I'll marry who I please. If you must know, I do like him better. Now, let me alone."

She turned from him on her heel and started away. With an impulse of forlorn hope he sprang after her, seizing one of her arms. Dolores thus arrested, startled,—screamed, though not very loud.

"No, no, Lola!" he breathed over her shoulder; "I won't hurt you; but come. No one loves you like me."

"Unless you want Father Chucho to see you," Dolores warned him in a low tone all on one note, "you had better go; I see him coming."

"I don't mind Father Chucho," he declared, pulling her backwards with him, however; "but you must come."

"No, I will not," she said, low but violently; and she struggled.

He continued pulling her backwards; and all at once she called: "Father! Father Chucho!"

Raising his eyes suddenly, Cristobal could see that a little figure in the moonlight some way off

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had halted. He put a hand over her mouth, as she called again.

This time the figure began to come towards them, running.

Cristobal, after making an ineffectual attempt to lift the resisting girl in his arms, let go of her; and as she sprang away clear of him, he turned and started down the hill. Father Maria de Jesus, who since he had seen the light suit before, at once recognized it, called after him his name, "Cristobal," in tones so peremptory that Cristobal, despite himself, halted a moment.

"I am not surprised," cried the priest, "that you dare not look me in the face."

Whereupon the other deliberately turned back and looked him in the face.

The Father continued: "How can I make you ashamed of yourself? Again and again you do exactly what I have told you not to do."

Cristobal had been standing there rather irresolutely, glancing in crestfallen wise from Dolores to the priest. Of a sudden his anger burst forth, and he answered ferociously: "What business have you, anyway, telling me what to do and not to do? You are not my priest. I should have a much better priest than a little crucifier like you."

Father Chucho's righteous wrath also blazed up. "Go away from my village," he commanded, pointing out over the plain below; "and never

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come back. I am tired of you. I have tried to help you——"

"I do what I choose," blurted Cristobal; "I don't leave for you; but because I want to."

"Leave, for whatever reason," repeated the priest firmly.

Dolores watched each in turn as he spoke, her eyes glowing with admiration.

"Don't be too free and easy with your village," cried Cristobal back at him, as he went slowly down towards the river. "Decent people are ashamed of you, too; crucifiers!"

Father Maria de Jesus made no answer to this; but stood yet peering down into the wan moonlight, in whose thin obscurity the light form of the retiring intruder vanished as if melted away.

A voice came back again, from nearer than seemed possible considering the speaker could not be seen. It cried out in the night: "Go on, go on with your murder. God bless you! Decent people are ashamed of you."

This was the last they heard.

The priest waited for some time, standing motionless. Then he murmured, "God forgive him!" To Dolores he said: "I am glad I happened to be near. You did right not to go with him. He is a very wicked, unrepentant man."

"Yes," answered Dolores.

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XII.

CONTRARY VISIONS

WHEN Father Maria de Jesus left the church after mass the next morning, he said kindly to the wistful few that hung round the door, "Go to your work before it is too hot. I haven't decided on anything yet. To-morrow will be Sunday and then we will rest. But the Lord has not spoken to me yet nor given me any new light. Has He to any of you?"

No one answered. But Oestocris, who gazed at him with solemn bleary eyes from the edge of the little crowd, nodded her white head seriously, either, it might be, in answer or in confirmation, of his words. But she said nothing; and started towards her house even before the Father towards his.

He turned off at the little brown adobe hut where Cristoké lived. As there was no one in the porch he went inside. There was no one there, either. So, after looking into both dirty rooms and calling the dog, who didn't respond, he went out again.

He started towards the fields. It was already hot and getting hotter every minute. The ground was as warmly dry as if there had never

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been rain; not a cloud in a burnished sky announced more. Rosary in hand, he made across the road and through the dry gravelly ditch, and came to a field where several men and women were languidly scraping the rich but burned soil. Each seemed to work independently of the others; two had stopped and were standing erect, saying their beads. Though none of them spoke, those that noticed the Father bowed their heads to him.

"Where is Cristoké?" he asked the nearest man.

The man gave a grunt expressing ignorance.

A woman leaning on her rake beside him, stretched an arm with its blue sleeve rolled to the elbow, to point towards the next field. The priest looked; but already such was the glare and the steaming heat that objects could not be made out at much distance; and while the whole horizon trembled, there was nothing that seemed actually to move. However, he started in that direction. As he walked over the rough ground the first thing to assert itself was the line of foothills that bound that side of the Valley. They began to take on a cool green form above the warm moist blue line of mirage. Then a wooden cross began to start out of the background and to assume a gaunt black shape. It was a rough cross, higher than a man and with wide spreading arms. As he came nearer some dark thing

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on the tan-colored ground in front of the cross finally proved to be a person kneeling there.

A yellow dog came wriggling towards him, whining and fawning and turning up beseeching eyes. It ran over his bare feet, and when he halted, set first to licking them and then to pulling with its teeth at his robe.

The person on the ground was Cristoké. His spade was stuck upright into the earth near him; and he was fallen back on his heels with his arms stretched out on either side,—like Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata. His face was as much transfigured with rapture as if he, too, were receiving some such divine communication; and his wondering, protruding eyes were fixed upon the bare cross.

Father Maria de Jesus followed his gaze to the cross; but in vain he studied the rough woodwork to see what the other could see there. Cristoké took no notice of him. His set look was that of one hypnotized; the priest touched him on the shoulder.

"What is it?" he asked eagerly; "is it a vision you see?"

The old man brought one withered arm slowly round till it pointed to the cross; while the other through very fatigue dropped to his side. His brown lips never ceased moving in prayer.

"Don't you see him?" he replied in a trem-

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bling, hardly audible voice. "There! on the cross, San Rafael."

Dropping to his knees the priest made the sign of the cross fervently again and again.

"No," he said hoarsely, staring with all his eyes at the black cross; "I don't see."

"San Rafael," muttered Cristoké, "crucified in glory."

The dog had gone and lain down on his belly a few feet away. With his wet, narrow tongue hanging out, he curiously regarded the two kneeling figures, cocking his head on one side.

Father Maria de Jesus stared and stared.

"O God!" he cried, suddenly dropping his head on his chest and clasping his hands, "let me see too."

"Make me see, make me see!" he wailed, shaking his clasped hands back and forth, and repeating his supplication over and over till his voice broke into a dry sob, and tears began to run down his cheeks.

Cristoké, his eyes always on the cross, oblivious of the other, kept on muttering his prayers, though he sank down lower and lower on his heels.

"No," sighed the priest, swallowing his sobs, "I can't see him. I can't. O God, why am I not worthy, too?"

Silently now, but breathing fast and loud, he continued to gaze mournfully on the empty

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cross. At last he also murmured a short prayer, and then signed himself on the brow and the breast.

He remained on his knees till the trembling old man by his side little by little lost the fixedness and the light out of his wrinkled face. By degrees Cristoké ceased to mutter. His eyes became dull again. By and by the priest turned to him and said in a whisper: "Tell me about him. How did he look?"

"His face was all bright and moving," said Cristoké, "it hurt my eyes. He had a gold crown on; and a red robe; and incense went up all the time."

"Incense?"

"Yes, that's what made the clouds round his head. See! they're there yet," he pointed up into a sky that was unbroken blue.

"I smelt the incense," he said simply.

"How did he come?" asked the priest.

"I was here digging, or I was going to dig. And when I looked at the cross he was there on it. I knew it was San Rafael, because he looked like the picture in the church,—at first, before he got bright. And I knew it couldn't be Our Lord, because he didn't have the crown of thorns. This was a gold crown, like Our Lady of Santa Fe."

"Did he—did he say anything?" the priest asked keenly.

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Cristoké shook his head slowly. For a moment he added nothing more.

Then: "He didn't move. Only the incense went up; and before he went away he was all covered with it."

The priest rose from his knees; the dog, jumping up, too, began to wag all over. After gazing silently for some time at the cross, Father Maria de Jesus stooped, and taking the old man under the armpits, lifted him as reverently as Mary lifts Elizabeth in pictures of the Visitation.

"This is a sign at last," said the priest half to himself.

"The Lord has chosen me, hasn't he?" asked the old man eagerly.

"We must see," the priest was guarded, "who else has had visions. Come, let's go to the village."

He took the old man's spade; the dog followed sedately.

As they passed through the fields, the laborers followed them. Instinctively they turned to Oestocris's house. The Father and Cristoké entered first; behind them about a dozen Penitentes.

It was the largest room in the hamlet, and the usual place for meetings. There was nothing in it but two colored plaster-casts,—a Pieta and a Crucifixion,—and one large rough cupboard. As there were no seats, every one sat down on the

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ground. At one end was the Father, with Cristoké on one side of him, and Oestocris, whom they had found weaving a basket, on the other.

Father Maria de Jesus began, "Our prayer for a sign from heaven has been answered."

The only response was several grunts.

At this moment Paez came in, followed first by Dolores and after a space by Fanita. No one paid any attention to them as they skirted the circle and crouched down, — one girl on either side of the young man,—in a corner of the gloomy room.

"What was the sign?" Oestocris asked calmly. "Has Our Lady told you who is to be our Christ?" There was a skeptical note in her voice.

The Father recounted to them the vision of Cristoké. They sat as silent as usual; only moving when at each holy name he set them the example to make the sign of the cross; and at the end of his recital there was a good space of silence. Nobody asked any questions; and the first to speak was again Oestocris, who, in her shrill old voice, said: "And suppose any one else had a message. You do not say San Rafael spoke to him."

There was another pause.

"Visions come in the night as well as in the morning," pursued the old woman; "and I be-

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lieve the Holy Mother has chosen me to fill her own sacred part in our festival."

Everyone looked not at her but at Paez. He, however, sat as self-contained as the rest of the solemn circle.

The Father spoke across the dim room to him: "Where were you last night? Did you have a vision?"

Without turning his head Paez glanced at Dolores; and Fanita saw the glance. But before the young man need speak, his mother's voice again cut the calmness:

"I am the one that had the message."

All their eyes shifted to her. Raising one hand, she pointed to the plaster crucifix. Under its cross there was a blue Virgin.

"Our Lady of The Seven Sorrows," she began, "appeared to me last night while I was asleep and said, 'Oestocris!' and I said, 'Here, Blessed Virgin.' She was dressed in her blue robe, and had a pair of glass beads in her hand, and her Sacred Heart on her bosom, with a crown on it and little flames out of the top. Her voice was very soft and sweet, like the wind; and she had a little cradle with the Infant Jesus in it, all in gold and covered with jewels." She paused to make the sign of the cross, and then added in a lowered voice: "And He had a face just like my Paez."

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This statement caused a general grunt of astonishment.

Cristoké, though, was very calm; he was even fondling his dog, who licked his fingers.

"And she took Him out of the cradle," continued Oestocris, "and gave Him to me, and said, 'Take Him; and when He is grown give Him back to me;' and I said, 'I must take Him, Blessed Lady?' Because He was all covered over with jewels. But she took Him out and put Him in my arms and vanished away, and the jewels vanished, too. He was just like my Paez; He had long black hair and little ears like him. And she was just like the statue there." Pointing to it again, she ceased.

The silent circle sat looking at one another and at the priest. He remained with his eyes fixed on the dark brown wall opposite. His lips moved a little in prayer. The only sound was made by Cristoké's dog twisting himself into a more comfortable position.

At last Father Maria de Jesus, sighing deeply, said in a grave voice, pitched lower than usual, so that one or two had to lean forward to hear: "I can't tell. God would not send us two visions contradicting each other. One of them must be a device of the Evil One."

There was a low murmur. The old man and the withered old woman on either side gave him

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a quick sharp glance. Their eyes met, and both their faces darkened and their lips tightened.

"We shall have to fall back on choosing by lot," said the priest sadly; "for there is not much time left to choose."

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XIII

FANITA'S CHOICE

AFTER the priest's disappointed announcement most of the Penitentes, staying in their crouching posture upon the floor, began to say their beads. There soon arose a muffled chant of a dozen subdued voices repeating the same prayers. It was very monotonous; but sometimes it became louder and almost fierce, and again soft and slow and tender.

Paez, however, after a moment or two, making the sign of the cross repeatedly and bowing on one knee to each of the plaster images, went silently out into the open air. Fanita and Dolores, getting up at the same instant, stole round the wall of the dimly-lighted room. Each turned at the door to make a hasty obeisance; and the stranger girl found herself in the bright warm porch just behind the Penitente girl.

Fanita gave the other a quick look over her shoulder—quick but hateful. The two girls had never spoken to each other but once; and they didn't speak now.

Fanita in her red waist flashed down the open after Paez, who was strolling towards the river,

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— also towards Panchita's, where Dolores lodged.

Dolores paused an instant, then with a frown and a pursing of her lips she deliberately followed.

Fanita overtaking him, demanded: "Where are you going?"

"Down there," he replied with a jerk of his head.

"Down to her house?" said Fanita.

"Whose house?"

"That girl's;" she moved her head to indicate Dolores.

"Lola? No, I'm not!"

"Don't call her Lola!" exclaimed the girl so furiously that he stared at her, astonished.

"Why, Nita!" he said.

"I hate her!" cried Fanita, seizing his forearm and shaking it a little, and letting it drop.

Paez fixed his black eyes on her for an instant. Then he looked on the ground; and they walked on towards the river side by side. He regarded the dirty white of his skin-tight cotton trousers; while the maiden kept her fiery eyes straight ahead. So they paced on till they reached the brink of the shallow little river.

"Where were you last night?" snapped Fanita.

Paez, slowly turning his face toward her, answered almost contemptuously: "Down here."

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"With her?" she cried, before he had fairly said the words.

He hesitated, frowning.

"Ah! I saw you look at her when Father Chucho asked you where you had been. Little devil! she was with you. I know it. You needn't to say anything. Why couldn't she stay down in the plain where she belongs and carry on her love-affairs? Why couldn't she go back there? I'll pray to the Blessed Virgin to send her down there again, and—and—" even Fanita's rage hesitated — "and to hell, afterwards!" she added in a whisper.

Though she flushed nearly as red as her waist, her eyes remained bold and flashing.

Paez looked at her, shocked.

"I can't help it," said the girl pitifully. "I thought you loved me."

"I do, Nita," he protested.

"You did till she came, I know; but now——" she bit her under lip and shook her head impatiently.

"I do, I do," he insisted, taking her hand.

Fanita snatched it away.

"What did you say to her last night?" she demanded coldly. "'I do! I do!' Did you kiss her?" she asked with her eyes half closed.

He made no answer.

"Well, if you didn't you will soon, if you get

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the chance. But I don't intend to give you the chance."

He looked inquiringly at her.

"I don't," she repeated firmly. "O Paez," she went on with passion, "I love you, anyway, and I am not going to let that girl have you. She isn't a good girl, she has lovers down there, and up here, too. She makes eyes at Pasco as much as at you; and every other man, too. She only likes you because you are a man; not because you are Paez. I love you. I have always loved you. You are mine, Paez," she seized his hand and twisted his fingers affectionately; "and I am going to give you to the Blessed Virgin."

"What do you mean?" he asked weakly, with dry lips. He let his hand stay coldly in hers.

"I am going to give you to Our Lady to be the Christ."

She turned to face him. Her eyes flashed and her smile was a mixture of love and triumph.

Paez's dark face paled. His lips falling apart, he stared helplessly at her. Then he looked all round him, as if frightened,—at the sky and at the river. He breathed hard.

Fanita turned and left him.

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XIV

A LOVER'S PROMISE

SCARCELY was Fanita gone when Dolores came from behind the little trees. Indeed, the other girl, looking back over her shoulder, saw them together. She turned and spat on the ground towards them, but neither Paez nor Dolores was watching her.

"Let's go sit down," said the girl quietly.

Paez with a disconsolate look followed her through the trees. Holding their branches aside tenderly to let him pass, she led the way to the small natural lawn where they had sat and talked the night before. Paez threw himself down in the shade; and leaning on one elbow gazed at the opposite bank. The girl, sitting down near his head, looked quietly at his weak, handsome, frowning face. The sun came in glimpses through the branches; the only sound was the whispering of the slow current; there was a faint smell of warm moist mud; but where they were it was comfortably cool.

Before long the girl's fixed eyes drew the young man's look. He frowned harder, shook his head sympathetically, and sighed.

Dolores, with eyebrows raised, half nodded to show she understood.

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"She's very angry, isn't she?" she began in a soft tone, stooping to pull up a spear of grass.

He sighed again, in assent.

"I think I shall go away," said Dolores.

"No, stay here." He jerked himself on his elbow nearer to her.

"I mean away from San Rafael," she explained, looking over him.

He sat up.

"Because she doesn't like you," he said defiantly.

"Because it makes trouble for you."

Paez lay down flat on his back and stared up into the trees. His long hair lay on the grass; and Dolores surreptitiously moved her hand along inch by inch till her finger-tips touched it.

Suddenly Paez turned over and lay on his face; and somehow in doing so, he got her hand into his two and put his cheek down on them.

"Stay here," he said.

"No," whispered Dolores, putting her head down near him. "You come with me."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I can't," he repeated.

"Why not?" said Dolores. "Don't you—don't you love me?"

"I daren't, I am afraid," he breathed.

She drew away her hand. He turned over and sat up, looking at her. His face was warm and

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flushed and bits of leaves stuck in his black locks.

"Your mother wants you to be the Christ," said Dolores, almost whispering.

"I know it," he answered in the same tone.

"Aren't you afraid of that?" she asked.

"If I go they will kill me. We couldn't get away."

"Yes, we could. Easy," she replied. "At night."

"They would come after me and kill me," he insisted.

"No, they wouldn't. Who?" said Dolores.

"I don't know. But they would."

"We will go to New Mexico. I will take care of you," said the girl.

"No," he repeated, as if frightened. "No! I won't."

"Do you want to be crucified?" she said.

He shook his head.

"She wants you to be, too," said Dolores.

"How do you know?"

"I know," she half laughed. "I know well enough. She's jealous. She's a beast." Dolores nearly snarled.

There was a pause. Paez, who was picking at the grass, coughed a little.

"They will make you carry one of those big crosses forty days," began the girl with much

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distinctness; "and they won't give you anything to eat; will they?"

"Not much," said Paez nervously.

"You will have to stay out of doors all the time," she went on, "in the sun and in the rain every afternoon; and all night. And never go to bed; never lie down without that heavy thing squeezing you. Some of them die that way, don't they?"

"Yes," said Paez hoarsely.

"And then, if you don't die, they will nail you on it, with nails through your hands. Ugh!" She shuddered and closed her eyes. "And nails through you feet;" she leaned over and touched his bare instep. Paez drew it away, with a little cry under his breath. "Just like Our Savior on His cross, suffering so dreadfully. Only He was God, and it didn't hurt Him so much. And they'll stick a spear in your side." She paused and rubbed her hand across her eyes.

"Do they have a crown of thorns?" she asked.

Paez got his voice with an effort. "Yes," he said faintly.

"Did you ever see them do it?"

He shook his head, then nodded it.

"When I was a baby," he said in a dry voice.

"Did he scream?" asked the girl.

Paez nodded. His chin trembled, and there was sweat on his forehead. Dolores, putting her hands over her ears, gave a little moan.

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"Don't," implored the boy, dragging her arm away.

He was shuddering nervously.

"Then come with me," begged Dolores.

He shook his head.

She looked into his pallid face. He fixed his eyes on hers only a moment, before they restlessly wandered away.

"Come with me," she said coaxingly.

Still he shook his head. He swallowed.

"You have a lover there," he said.

"Ah! she told you that," cried Dolores angrily.

He vaguely nodded.

"Is that why you won't come? I won't go to him. He knows I won't. I'd have no one but you," she took his cold hand again.

"No," he said, getting up and not looking at her. "No, I can't; I'm afraid."

"Coward!" cried Dolores, loud with rage.

Knitting her teeth, she squeezed his hand as fiercely as she could. Then she flung it away and ran from him.

In a moment, Paez, who shivered even in the hot sunshine, followed. As he went through the trees, she sprang out and threw her arms round his neck.

"Paez," she pleaded. "Darling! Come. I love you. I love you better than any one else. Come," she put her head in his neck and kissed

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his cheek. "Paez," she repeated softly, pressing him to her, "come with me away from here.'

His wandering eyes at last focused themselves on hers. His long hair brushed her cheek. He put his head down, or let her pull it down, till his lips touched her face.

"When are you going?" he asked.

"To-night. You will come?"

"Yes," said Paez, putting his arms around her.

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XV

THE CURFEW

AS early that night as was possible without being noticed, Dolores, going into her own room, tied up her bundle. As she had taken little out of it, it didn't take long to get it ready and placed under the unglazed window. Outside was the moonlight, silvering the ground; darkness beyond; and overhead a serene sky with a motionless moon. She could hear in the porch the swishing and swashing of Pasco's rinsing his dye-tubs.

With bent arm and raised hand, she hesitated. Then with a swing of her skirts she flung through the big living-room, where Panchita, her hands folded over her rosary on her fat lap, nodded in the half-light of an ill-smelling lamp. Dolores having pushed the handle of her little white pistol into her bosom, stepped into the porch. Pasco, who was rocking a big tub on its edge, stopped at once; but the girl swung past him. In a moment she heard his watery task recommence behind her.

There was no one abroad. Quietly she arrived before the house of Oestocris. As there are no clocks in San Rafael and as besides she had no exact engagement with Paez, she waited.

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Through the open door, under the shade of the porch, she could see into the house. One end of the room,—a dim emptiness, with a blue blotch, which was the Pieta on the farther wall, —was all that was visible; by going farther down the gentle slope she could see more of that wall; and by going as far as possible and as near the house as she cared to, she could just catch sight of one half of old Oestocris, sitting quite still on the floor. Though, after she had looked for some time, the old creature moved her arm and rested her hand differently on the ground.

Overhead in the sky were the yellow moon and ever and ever so many stars,—brighter as they got farther from the moon and fewer near the horizon. The sky seemed to stretch out she couldn't imagine how far. Down in the Valley no light was to be seen in any direction. The warm air was perfectly motionless and soundless.

As Dolores stood waiting, she strained her eyes not only to gaze into the house, where all she found was a dark spot on the brown wall, but also to make out the windows; but stare her hardest, the windows remained empty and black. At last her eyes were so tired that she looked up again into the placid, twinkling sky. Suddenly a banging brought them back at once to the house. But it was at some other house; this one was as dark and silent, and the one open

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room as dim-lighted and silent as ever. Then the noise stopped.

Dolores, sighing unconsciously, shifted her weight to the other leg. She was weary with standing. So she began, one slow step at a time, to walk towards the church. At first she looked over her shoulder at every step; then she would take six together without looking. Still Paez did not come.

She didn't go far; but turning and strolling back, went a little nearer the house, even into the faint patch of light falling out through the door. She kept on downwards as far as she could go and still see into the bare room; there she halted.

Taking her little pistol out of her bosom, she examined it by the light of the moon, kissed it and put it back into her bosom.

After that she took her pair of beads and began to pray softly; but before the third Ave, with an impatient sigh, she hastily stuffed them back into her breast.

Then she was aware of somebody coming. From the direction and the light tread it could be only Pasco. She hastily slipped into the shade of the house. There she waited,—clenching her fists nervously at her sides and winking in the darkness,—till she saw him first pass one way;—and then a long, long time, during which nothing happened, only her heart beat and her knees

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got tired,—till she saw him pass back the other way.

After that, as she was creeping softly round the house, carefully peering through the porch posts into the one lighted room, which she could see gradually more and more of, all at once the light ceased, and that room was as black as the rest of the house. Holding her breath to listen, Dolores stood quite still. Something within the house creaked. She caught with one hand to the round post and harkened. There was no more sound. She began to breathe softly, but still she stood and listened and waited.

Then on the heavy, quiet air she began to hear, far, far off, a sort of murmur; a rumbling murmur, steady and monotonous, but growing always a little louder, and a little louder, till it could be easily heard, and the air even seemed to tremble out beyond one, just a little bit. Then in some way the sound became less and less, and by degrees faded away into the large silence of the night; so that nobody could have said when it ceased. Dolores knew that it was the ten o'clock train, way off down in the Valley, passing on its way to Creede.

She crept out farther into the open, where she could see six of the village houses. There was not a glimmer of light left in them. She knew that the passing of that train is a curfew to San Rafael.

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After more silent, hopeless waiting, she started off on a fair pace to the river. Once there, pushing in among the trees, she flung herself down on the bit of grass where she had talked with Paez. With chin in hand she sat watching the reflection of the moon break to pieces and join together in the water. All at once she jumped up again and fairly ran back the way she had come. Stopping at her own house to put her head into her own window, she called, very softly, "Paez!"

Getting no answer, she hurried up to his house. "Paez!" she called in a whisper, standing just outside the porch and holding her hand to her ear. But she got as little answer here.

And although she walked cautiously five times round the house, sighing wearily, and each time stopping to whisper "Paez" as loud as she dared into the porch; and though she waited in the night a full hour of silence longer, before crawling back into her window, not a sign of Paez did she see. She stayed, therefore, in San Rafael.

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XVI

A RECRUITING OFFICE

THE mind of Cristobal on his long ride back from San Rafael and for days and days afterwards was possessed with one intense feeling, hatred for Father Maria de Jesus. Growing, as it did, as much from his passion for Dolores as from the sting of the priest's own scorn for him personally, it overshadowed for a time that passion. With one of his new-found friends in Las Animas County, a half-Mexican cowboy, with whom he spent long hours drinking, and for whose superior knowledge of the big world he soon acquired a great respect, he talked over the subject of the Penitentes. His naïve discretion, mingled with his aversion to making himself prominent since the murder of Anunciato (although the fear of punishment for that was continually weakening), kept him from putting the case in a very personal light. But the general mind of Catholics, and especially Spaniards, in those districts was so strongly prejudiced against the Penitentes, as degenerate half-breeds who were at best a shame to the country, that the topic was one on which he met a ready response. Within himself he harbored the intense desire to make a private raid

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on the hamlet and kill at least the priest: but apart from a disinclination to have another murder menacing his safety, he was soon won over to the view of his comrade that the United States Government would willingly send soldiers to clean out the disgraceful Indians. And ultimately he became persuaded that it would send soldiers, if it knew that a crucifixion was to be held on the 24th of that very October.

It was on the 16th that this idea was really clear in his mind; and nursing it as a solace to his individual hatred, he saw in it the possibility of his revenge. Early the next morning he was up and away. Catching a train at Trinidad, he arrived that afternoon in Pueblo.

This was his first visit to so large a town. Rather at a loss he strolled down the ramshackle main street, helplessly wondering what his next move should be; when he was brought up short by the sight of a sign standing on the sidewalk. This sign bore pictures of a group of lusty soldiers in divers uniforms, and underneath a good deal of reading matter. Looking from it to the building in front of which it stood, Cristobal saw in an open second-story window the back of a man in blue, the same blue as in the uniforms pictured. And out of the neighboring window he saw hanging a flag. This coincidence at once restored his confidence, and mounting the flight of stairs leading up from the street, he pushed

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open a door and went into a bare, dingy room.

Two soldiers, one with several red chevrons on his sleeves, who were sitting tilted back in their chairs with their feet on a table, laughing and talking to each other, got up at his entrance and one of them said: "Well, young man, do you want to enlist?"

"No," replied Cristobal, as if offended at the question.

"Well, then, what do you want?"

"I want to tell you about the Penitentes."

"About what?"

The two soldiers stared blankly at each other and then the younger one laughed. "Come on old man," the Sergeant-Major encouraged him; "what is it you want to tell us about?"

"About——" Cristobal began again, exceedingly dignified: and then in his embarrassment taking refuge in Spanish, repeated in that language, "I want to tell you about the Penitentes."

The soldiers laughed again, and one of them said: "You'll never make us understand that way," while the other remarked: "Better get the doctor to talk to him."

At this moment an inner door, which had been ajar, was pulled open and a stout, soldierly-looking man in civilian's clothes entered.

"What is it, boys?" he asked briskly.

"This here gentleman is springing Spanish or

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some lingo on us, Major," replied the Sergeant-Major.

Cristobal, a picture of tremendous earnestness, fixed his eyes on the new-comer, who at once, speaking to him in Spanish, asked: "Well, what is it?"

Cristobal, his tongue loosened, poured forth a torrent of hasty words, trying to tell in one breath his whole story.

"Wait a minute," the surgeon caught him up, "you'll have to go slower than that if you want me to follow you. Come, let's have it again. The Penitentes, you say. They're the people down in the southern part of the State, who used to have the crucifixions? I've heard of them."

"Yes," answered Cristobal; "but they are going to have another next week; San Rafael's Day."

"What's that you say? You're sure! Let me see; I heard something about this in Denver, but I imagine—— Here, one of you men," he said in English, "run down stairs and telephone to the station and get Major Connor, and when you've got him, come up and let me know. It's a half hour yet to train time," and he consulted his watch.

The two soldiers had been standing looking blankly at the two speakers in a strange tongue; but at this demand the younger of them came to

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himself and briskly enough hurried from the room and rattled down stairs.

"Now, you come in here and tell me all about this," said the surgeon, turning again to Cristobal; and he led the way into the back room.

In about fifteen minutes the soldier who had gone down stairs, coming up again hurriedly, tapped on the inner door. "Major," he reported, when it was opened, "Major Connor is at the telephone, and he's in a—an awful rush; says he hasn't no time to spare."

"You wait here," the surgeon directed Cristobal over his shoulder, as he hastened out.

But Cristobal, having got the ear of an interested person, who seemed indeed so deeply interested that he was sure to carry the thing through, saw no further use of his remaining there; besides, he never altogether forgot that he was himself amenable to the law, if his murder was found out. Accordingly he quietly slunk from the recruiting office and down stairs and away; and the two soldiers not having heard their superior's order to him to wait, let him go.

Meanwhile the officer having taken up the receiver of the telephone, said into the instrument: "Hello, Major. You? Sorry to trouble you."

"Don't waste time apologizing," came the response; "I'm in a deuce of a hurry; what is it?"

"You remember the talk about the Penitentes

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—Penitentes, yes—down in San Rafael in the San Luis Valley—Oh, yes, you do, too. The Colonel's pal, the Archbishop,—the Archbishop, —told the Colonel about a month ago, that there was talk of their having a crucifixion down there; and there was some discussion about sending down to stop it."

"Yes, go on," came the answering voice; "I believe I remember. Didn't interest me much."

"You must remember," replied the surgeon with as much vehemence as is possible over a telephone; "and it must interest you now. I want you to report about it as soon as you get to town. Listen, and be sure you get this straight. Tell the Colonel I have good inside information that those people are planning to bring off this crucifixion next week, the 24th, and he ought to send down and see about it."

"He won't have time," came the response; "besides, you know the order to go——"

"Tell him to telegraph at once to Washington——"

"All right, I will. Say, old man, is there much more of this?"

"No. Only promise not to forget it."

"All right. I'll tell him with your compliments. Is that all? Good-bye——" And the droning of the telephone was suddenly the only sound in the surgeon's ears.

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"I'll write, too," he said, as he hung up the receiver.

Going back through the store, he mounted to the recruiting office.

"Hello, you men, where's that fellow?" he asked as he went in.

"Went away, Major, just after you left," replied the Sergeant-Major.

"The devil he did! Well, one of you go out and look for him. Or, wait; it's time to close up here. Both of you go."

But the surgeon never saw Cristobal again. He had gone back to Las Animas County to await results.

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XVII

AN ARBITER OF FATE

FATHER Maria de Jesus, driven to the conclusion that Heaven did not intend to signify directly who was to have the honor of protagonist in the festival, was forced, in order not to jeopard abandoning it for that year, to decide on a resort to chance. But he explained to Oestocris and to Cristoké and to as many of the younger Penitentes as consulted him, the hand of Heaven would be as actually, though less visibly, in this choosing as in the most indubitable miracle God might have sent.

The evening of choosing being set for the next after that on which Dolores had thought of deserting San Rafael, early that morning Pasco was sent down to the store at Antonito to buy the implements of augury.

When about noon he came slowly riding up the hill upon the Father's donkey, the whole of the Penitentes were waiting before the church to receive him. The priest saying his great, brown beads, stood in the middle. On one hand, behind his old mother, Paez was crowded near Dolores. As he noticed her pushing towards him among the praying people, he slipped more away from her; but Fanita was not far off on

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the other side. He felt in the opening of his dirty flannel shirt, and pulling out a blue glass rosary, began diligently on his first Hail Mary, piously looking down. Dolores getting next him, nudged him with her elbow. He twisted somewhat away from her; but as he inadvertently gave her his ear, the girl, putting her hand on his shoulder and speaking into his black love-locks, said in a tone that reached only to him: "Where were you?"

Paez moved his shoulder uncomfortably; but she kept her hand on it and breathed against his hair. Turning his head slightly, but not so as to let his eyes meet hers, he answered, "I couldn't come. My mother——"

The rest was lost under his breath, and in the half-snort of contempt and anger and love that the girl gave.

"Coward!" she hissed scornfully.

Tightening her lips, she stepped into an open space behind the priest. As she waited there, she couldn't resist leaning forward to look into his hanging brown hood.

At the same time, the other girl, Fanita, with one fierce squeeze, reached Paez from in front and demanded: "What was she saying?"

The young man, raising his black eyes from the ground, gave her a swift glance, combining fright and amusement. He said nothing; and at the same instant Oestocris, pushing in front of

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him to be next to the priest when Pasco arrived, crowded the girl away. Fanita caught the eye of Dolores; and the two girls, with lips apart, glared at each other threateningly. Neither would look away first; but Father Chucho came between them, as he stepped forward to Pasco, who was just dismounting.

The muttering of prayers ceased, as the young man solemnly held out his package. It was a shining white pasteboard box of playing cards; and on it rested several small pieces of silver. The priest put the change somewhere inside his robe; and then as the Penitentes, with wide eyes over one another's shoulders, closed in round him, he slit the edge of the box with his thumb-nail, and slid out the smooth white-edged cards. One dropped. Cristoké had stooped in an instant to pick it up, thereby losing his chance of holding the box, which the priest carefully placed in the eager hands of Oestocris. She minutely examined the picture on the front.

Father Chucho, taking in his left hand the card which the trembling old man reverently handed him, said: "This will be our first sign. Look, all of you! This card, the one that fell to the ground, shall be the one that bears the signal."

As he held it out, they all pressed closer to see it. He showed it nearer, here and there. It was the King of Spades.

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"It is a man, you see," he went on; "as who should say, 'Ecce Homo!' and he wears a crown, —the glorious crown of thorns of Our Lord."

No one's eyes were more glued to the card than Fanita's.

"I will put it into the middle of them all," continued Father Maria de Jesus, "and I will now lay them before the Host on the altar; where it is always right to leave whatever is to be blessed to the special service of the church. Keep a special fast to-day, and all of you pray to the Blessed Virgin and your patron saints to oversee and bless our sacred undertaking."

He went alone into the church. They could see that he laid the cards upon the altar and kneeled down before it.

Then the gathering broke up. Dolores with one cutting look at Paez, hurried to the side of Pasco; Panchita joined them. The rest dispersed to their several houses. A day of fast meant only prayer and contemplation,—no work in the parching fields.

They all left but Fanita. She hung irresolutely round the church; first peeping in and then turning her back to look under her shading hand down the hill. The sun was blazing down pitilessly; and though, like all the Penitentes, the girl was used to feel his scorching rays on her black hair, this morning she pulled up the back of her blue skirt and put it over her head. In

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that way, it hid all of her red waist, except just in front. Her dark face was heavy with decision; her eyes sick-looking but firm.

When she saw the priest slowly rise from the altar, she slipped stealthily round the church, and waited cautiously in the handsbreadth of shade there. She heard his bare feet on the ground. Another silent minute and she had stolen back round the corner and into the church. The air inside was close: she let her skirt drop again. Curtesying low to the altar, she made the sign of the cross with a finger-end of holy water.

With only one glance behind, she stepped boldly up into the chancel and took the box of cards off of Dolores's white mantilla on the altar. Then she sat down on the chancel-edge, facing the open door. Looking every other moment toward the door, she opened the box and began with awkward fingers to sort the cards, which stuck together. She laid them down carefully round her, each one separate. Though she did it as expeditiously as possible, she paused to look at the Queens. The first one, her of Diamonds, she turned both ways up to see the two faces. As soon as she reached the King of Spades, which she compared with the Queen and the Knave, so as to be sure, she shoved the cards all together again, with the fatal one on top. As she was squaring the edges and slipping them into the box, she paused to take them out again. Twice

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she slowly dealt out six cards with her left hand; each time she turned up the first one to be sure it was the King. She deliberated a moment, her forehead wrinkled. With a final nod she put them in and rather difficultly closed the box.

Then, with more hesitation and timidity than she had taken it down, she put it back into its place. Making the sign of the cross three times, she pushed back Dolores's white mantilla, bowed devoutly, and kissed the altar between her hands as the priest does at mass.

She came out of the church with her face serious but peaceful.

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XVIII

CASTING THE LOT

THAT evening when it was slowly getting dark outside and when indoors it was already dark except for the smoky lantern on Oestocris's old chest, the Penitentes began by ones and twos to arrive at her house. Fanita, among the earliest, came hurrying in, and instead of sitting demurely down on the floor, like those already there, and droning unintelligible prayers, she shot across to the old woman, who was standing near the lamp with her back to the door, and caught her round the body.

"Don't do that," exclaimed Oestocris severely, pulling free. "Who is it? Oh, Fanita! Why are you so foolish and childish?"

"Sh," cautioned the girl, finger on lip. "Don't scold. I have something important," she looked over her shoulder. "I have had a message."

"A message?" repeated Oestocris in a glad tone of comprehension.

"From Saint Francis," she spoke low.

The gray old creature nodded, impatient for more.

"You know he received the marks himself," said Fanita, tapping her left palm with her right

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forefinger. "He is my Saint. And he is the special patron—," she paused.

"Yes," whispered the old woman with fixed eyes.

"He wishes Paez to have it."

Oestocris's hard features smiled as she made the sign of the cross.

"He told me," the girl went on, "Paez must sit at the beginning of the circle to-night. Look! put him there," she pointed boldly; "under the Pieta; and when the Father considers where to begin——"

The old Indian's eyes were alight with pleasurable understanding.

"The Saints have heard us," she said fervently, but in a low tone; "we shall be honored and blessed,—I as his mother, you as his sweetheart."

Her withered old hand sought the girl's soft young one and squeezed it hard.

During this conversation the Penitentès had been quietly arriving. Each one, making the sign of the cross at the threshold, would go direct to some vacant space and without a word would sit on the floor and begin to pray. The women sat nearest the walls and the men formed a ring in front.

Oestocris, going to Paez, who was sitting near the door as absorbed as the rest, stooped, and in a whisper, bade him "Get up!"

He rose mechanically.

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Taking him by one arm, she led him across the room. Those in the way shuffled aside to let them by, and the two men sitting under the blue plaster Pieta, separated to make room for them to stand. Still holding her son by the arm, the old woman mumbled a prayer; then leaning towards him, said in a low tone: "Sit down and stay in this place."

Paez dropped obediently to his knees and sat on the earthen floor. His mother, recrossing the circle, sat down nearly opposite him.

A moment more and Father Maria de Jesus appeared in the doorway. Place was made for him to go into the middle of all his flock thus huddled together in this dim, hot, smoky room. The priest with his arms extended kneeled down facing the Pieta. His great brown rosary was in one hand, the case of cards in the other. After a silent prayer, standing up, he said to Oestocris: "Have you any tapers?"

Paez was half risen, when the old woman in a loud, determined voice, answered "No."

Paez, catching her eye, sank down again.

"I offered my last one this morning," she explained in a more suave tone, "to Our Lady of Santa Fe."

Father Chucho nodded to a small boy who was looking at him inquiringly from just inside the doorway. The small boy vanished into the silver night. While he was gone, quiet reigned. Every-

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one had ceased praying; there was only the sound of so many people breathing. The priest in his rough brown robe, with his bare feet, the hand holding the rosary clasped over the one holding the playing-cards, stood in the center. His face was stern and deliberative.

When the boy reappeared, Father Chucho stretched over the intervening sitters to grasp the two candles. Then laying the cards on the floor and putting the beads through his rope-girdle, he stood on tiptoe and reached at arm's length to fasten one of the tapers upright on the shelf above Paez's head and to light it with some matches he drew from his bosom. The other he arranged the same way before the plaster crucifixion. During this, all eyes were fixed on the shining packet lying in the midst; except those of Dolores, sitting next to Panchita and behind Pasco. From the dark background her eyes were fixed on Paez.

The lights being arranged, the priest kneeled again and now prayed audibly to Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, for her aid in their enterprise. After a briefer prayer than he often made, he took up the box and slipped out the cards. Then he paused.

"Begin under the Blessed Virgin, Father," spoke out Oestocris clearly in the midst of the silence. For a moment all the eyes shifted to her. Then they moved back to the cards. There was

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a Virgin in each statue; but in turning towards Oestocris, the Father's eye fell on the Pieta.

"You are right," said he. "I had proposed beginning there. I was only thinking how to explain. I will distribute one card each," he went on deliberately, "till all are gone. They are not to be touched or turned over till then; and at the end whoever has the King with the two Spades——"

A general sigh of relief rose as he carefully took the first card from the top of the deck and laid it, with its rose-pink back upwards, in front of Paez. There were fifteen men in the circle. They sat quite still; but the women and children behind them were soon on their feet, straining their necks to see each card carefully placed; and each one holding her breath when it came the turn of her son or husband or father.

Though all the men received their cards silently, most of them made some nervous movement. Old Cristoké made the sign of the cross tremulously for each of his three. Paez writhed visibly. Only Pasco kept utterly still.

The three cards that each one got the priest ranged somewhat in the form of a cross with very short arms. There were left eight cards,—enough to go half round again. The Father, as he dealt the cards, turned so as to face one candidate after another. These last eight he placed with increased deliberation.

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One woman uttered a little moan of excitement which no one noticed.

When all the cards were delivered there was another sigh of relief; and then another tense silence of waiting. The priest finally revolved himself round on his knees till he faced the Pieta. The candle-grease had been dripping on the shoulder of the flannel shirt of Paez.

Father Maria de Jesus made another prayer, to Our same Lady of Sorrows, asking her, if any human error had been made in the distribution of the cards, to deign mercifully to intervene and miraculously to change them as best suited her and San Rafael and the Father Himself, in Whose honor and to Whose glory the Penitentes were now, as in all things, proceeding.

No sooner had he said "Amen," than he stooped suddenly and turned over the top one of the four cards of Paez. It was the King of Spades.

A low wondering murmur ran round the circle of women. Oestocris pushing into the circle, ran over, fell on her knees, and examined the card. Then in her strident voice, she began thanking the Blessed Virgin so loud that little else was to be heard. The priest joined with her. Little else could have been heard, anyway, save the labored breathing of the trembling, haggard old Cristoké, whose every breath was a little groan.

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With shaking fingers he began dreamily turning over his own cards; then he leaned and did the same with those of the youth next him. All at once his weak old eyes grew fixed on one of them. It was the Jack of Spades. Snatching it up, he stumbled to his knees.

"Father," he called brokenly and gaspingly. "Here—here—is another!"

All sounds ceased, even Oestocris's praying. The youth whose card it was stared with horror. Paez had his hand over his mouth, while Father Chucho took the card and scrutinized it carefully.

"No," he said at last, "that one had blue hair; they are all a good deal alike."

Oestocris at once resumed her loud prayer. Cristoké relaxed into a heartbroken little heap. The women, dropping to their knees, joined in the praying and the men at first sitting silent, soon got on their knees and did the same.

Only Paez, with pale face and drooping chin, sat facing all the others and staring through them into vacancy.

Fanita, who was praying volubly, was nearly as red as her vermilion waist. But Dolores was as ashy as Paez. Squeezing past Panchita, she flung herself out into the open night, under the placid moon. She could look into the same room as the night before,—then so still and empty; now crowded with hot kneeling figures and buzz-

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ing with the monotony of praying voices; and in the midst, sitting dejected, silent, she could see that set, weak, gray face, the straight hanging, black locks, and those hopeless, unseeing eyes.

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XIX

THE CROSS-BEARER

EARLY the next morning the Penitentes assembled in the church. The cards had been ranged round its brown walls,—three or four under each Station. The King of Spades himself had been nailed to the foot of the cross that bore the great wax Christ.

Paez had one of the front benches to himself. Instead of his flannel shirt and white trousers, he wore one of Father Chucho's rough brown gowns, which was tied round his waist with a rope whence dangled a huge rosary. Already he had had his tonsure shaved; and the round spot was staring white in the midst of his long coal-black shiny hair. The face he turned to the altar this morning was rather heavy than despairing.

The sermon which Father Chucho preached after mass was largely a synopsis of former festivals; a sort of order of the day, which most of them knew from experience or tradition. During the forty days before San Rafael's Day he whom Heaven had chosen was to begin his pious undertaking by emulating the Savior's fast in the wilderness.

"None of you," said the priest, "must carry him any food; though, since we all know that

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however holy we poor mortals may become, we are still, so long as we remain on this wicked earth, only human; therefore, I will feed him every day with the Eucharist. And this shall represent not only the bread brought by the angels to Elijah, but also the heavenly and invisible manna of the spirit with which Our Lord was nourished by the Father. And not only are none of you to minister to him during his sojourn, but it will be better if none of you speak to him. I do not forbid that, for you know that angels from heaven consorted in the wilderness with Christ. But take care that your weak words are not rather those of the tempter. As we are all more liable to sin than to shine, look to it that you shall not be in danger of being called Satan."

He made a sign in the air to avert the evil omen. As he stepped back to the altar, the priest lifted his feet carefully; and all, by straining their necks, could see that he was stepping over the black wooden beam of the huge cross, which lay there ready. Father Maria de Jesus beckoned to Paez, who rose listlessly. The priest gave him a helping hand up into the chancel. The young man in the loose gown stood as motionless and heavy-looking, near the Epistle side of the altar, as if he had been drugged. His lack-luster eyes saw none of those fastened upon him; not even Panita's nor Dolores's.

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The small acolyte in red, standing at the Gospel side, held a large brass bowl into which the priest, who wore his green chasuble and stole, dipped a silver water-brush and slowly aspersed the holy-water over the cross at his feet,—going carefully from one end to the other. When he sprinkled what water remained out upon the standing congregation, they all, as a drop touched them, bowing down here and there, made the sign of the cross.

Then he gave the censer to the red acolyte to fill and to fire. Standing on the altar step, he turned to the crucifix and censed it; then facing about to swing the smoking pot on its brazen chains, he censed the Penitentes; after that he turned to Paez. Then he gave back the censer to the boy, who kept it swinging steadily, while he himself, taking the tractable Paez, who moved as in a dream, made him lie face down upon the cross, his arms stretched out on its arms. He in his stiff green silk kneeled behind reciting the Lord's Prayer in Latin, while the scarlet boy with the censer, from the altar step behind swung out great sweet puffs of smoke, now on one side of the priest, now on the other.

The Penitentes dropped to their knees during the prayer; but rose again when Father Maria de Jesus, after pulling Paez up off the cross, let him stand demurely in his place again.

Then the Father stooped and tried to lift the

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cross. Though he could raise the end from the floor he could not stand it up. So with a glance he summoned two of all the ready men in the church below. Several who, thinking they had caught his eye, started up, he waved back with his hand. Pasco and another who was young and powerful, coming up, proud but timid, dropped to one knee in front of the altar before they put hand to the task. With their aid the priest got the heavy cross on end, leaning in one corner.

As soon as it was in place he bent forward, holding the upright beam between his two hands and reverently kissed the rough wood. Then he called Paez, who mechanically went through the same motions. After him the acolyte, Pasco, and the other man in turn kissed it. As each one finished, he very slowly and gravely made the sign of the cross.

Then the priest turned, and as he gave a signal with his head, at once there was a movement among the men. Old tottering Cristoké, who sat on the end of a front bench this time, came first; and after him all the men and boys one by one, down to a tot led by his father. Eagerly but slowly they came in turn; and each one solemnly saluting the altar, then walking with dignity the few steps to the cross and kissing it just as the priest had, finally bowed before the

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Father who gave him a blessing before he descended.

After the men had all gone out of the church one by one, except the Father, the acolyte, and Paez, the signal was given to the women. Headed by Oestocris, they came as slowly and as dignifiedly as the men; but they breathed more nervously and held their lips longer to the cross.

At last when they too were finished, and Father Maria de Jesus could see through the open door the silent groups out in the sunshine, he made a signal to the boy to begin ringing the bell. The boy seized the rope, and as peal after muffled peal beat forth beyond the roof above them, Paez without a word, his face set, laid hold of the huge cross, toppled it slowly over, and hand over hand let it gradually down toward him, till the beam turning rested on his shoulder, the cross-bar down in front, exactly as you may see in the Station of the Cross.

Dragging the great weight behind him, he got slowly down out of the chancel and step by step trailed down the aisle and out the open door,—behind him the priest in his green chasuble holding up his fingers in blessing. As the door, though high enough, was not broad enough, the cross had to be carefully manipulated through. This Paez managed with unheeding pains.

So there was left in the dim heavy-smelling

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church only the scarlet-robed, dark-faced little acolyte, who pulled and relaxed on his taut bell-rope, trying to see but not seeing what was being done outside. When, however, he did see the crowd round the door separate and the creature, weighed down by a heavy cross bound on his back, stumble through the middle of them, he left off ringing and hurried out to watch with the rest, the weary, crawling, stumbling brown figure, bent under his cruel load, going alone to the wilderness.

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PART SECOND

XX

THE COMING OF STANGE

MOUNT BLANCA, immense and blue, rising from a lake of mirage, smiled upon the far-reaching San Luis Valley. The sun also smiled on the Valley this afternoon, and very warmly. The heat rose vibrating. All the trees on the horizon floated in mirage. The few shadows were like pieces of black paper cut out smoothly and laid on the glaring yellow sand. The flat lands were very quiet. In Antonito, except for a few loungers round the railway station, not a man was to be seen. Not a mule-wagon crept over the sand roads. At Alamosa the down train from Denver and Pueblo turned off the long tangent,—the fifty-two-mile tangent, tracking through the interminable waste,—and came on to the sixteen-mile tangent. Soon it could be seen from Antonito. As the smoke crept nearer, and then as the narrow-gauge rumbled up to the ramshackle station and stopped with much puffing, the loungers with their hands in their shaps pockets, lazily arose. Only one passenger got off.

He was dressed not in flannel shirt and buck-

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skin shaps, nor yet like a swell; but in a long brown linen duster. He carried a bag covered with Brussels carpet. A great pile of elongated bundles of white canvas, and several bunches of tin pots and kettles strung on ropes having been rattled out summarily from the baggage car, the train departed. The loungers stared at the stranger.

"Where is Peter Wezel's hotel?" he asked in a brisk, pleasant voice.

One dirty youth in a wide felt hat came to the end of the platform to point it out to him. "There it is," he drawled. "Do you want that baggage took anywheres?"

"Why, no," answered the other, walking away. "It isn't mine."

"Some one else a'comin'?" called the youth after him.

"Think there must be," he replied over his shoulder.

The house was near. It was one of the very few wooden buildings in the adobe village, and had been painted yellow. At the front door sat a slouchy fat man with one eye, who got up as the stranger approached. He was lame.

"I was told you could keep me here," began the thin man, depositing his carpet-bag on a bench along the house-front.

Wezel took out his pipe and spat before saying, "Naturally. It's the only hotel in town."

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"Can I have a room?"

"I guess you could. There's three with beds to 'em and no one here nor likely comin'. They ain't much choice. Will I take your grip?"

His good eye was red and sleepy.

"Yes, thank you. Or, wait. I'll come and see the rooms. I might have a preference."

As they entered the dingy hall the landlord said, slowly, sucking his pipe, "They ain't no choice in summer. I wouldn't sleep in none of 'em. And they're all two dollars a day."

"Some more people are coming," said the tall man mildly. The sleepy eye began to waken. "Some soldiers."

"Where are they at now?" asked Wezel doubtingly.

"They got off above. I dare say they'll be here soon."

"Wanted to march down, I reckon, for the exercise," suggested the host, wiping his red, sweating face.

The stranger, going so quickly from one miserable room to another as to give the lame man no time for another slow question, picked out the best of the three. He left his valise and his duster on the bed. His clothes were black. He was clean-shaven.

When they were again down-stairs, "I suppose that's the church," he said, pointing to a triangular-topped facade across the trees.

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"Naturally."

"And Father Emanuelé lives right there?"

"If he ain't dead," said Wezel, with a choking cough by way of laugh, "and gone to purgatory. Wait a minute. You have to make your mark."

He limped inside and came out with a dog's-eared leather-covered ledger.

"You're no friend of the Father's," said the stranger tentatively, glancing at Wezel as he wrote.

"'Joseph Dumain,'" read the host, taking the book, "I ain't no man's enemy. Residence, please; or last temporary residence. Pueblo'll go."

Dumain, taking book and pencil again, wrote, saying: "As it happens, I do reside there. So you don't object to the Father?"

"If it ain't one Father it's bound to be another," answered Wezel, dispassionately, "I ain't no Catholic myself, nor no Saint. But Emanuelé don't bother me, if he is a damn fool."

Dumain wrote "S. J." after his name.

"I see your last guest was more than a week ago," he said.

"Yes. Leather Jimson after a horse. The boys is all gone up to Cripple, most; and the place is dull. But if there's soldiers a-comin'— Say, look here," his eye grew intelligent, "stranger, do you know the row? Is it Saints? Nit?

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Then, say, is it the San Rafaelers? My, there'll be some fun, sure!"

Dumain only nodding mysteriously, left him; and with a curious glance up the railway track, hurried off towards the church.

Wezel with another choking chuckle also looked up the straight, narrowing track. Shading his eye, he could see something. Not a train; it must be a hand-car. Squinting with his good eye, he moved into the shade and watched it. When it got nearer, he could see that it was worked by five blue-legged men with their coats off. He was not near enough to hear their swearing.

He went inside a minute to see how many full bottles of whisky he had. When he came out again, the soldiers, with their coats over their arms, were tramping over from the station.

"Hello," shouted one of them. "Got two rooms?"

"Got any whisky?" asked a young one with a blonde mustache.

"Go it easy, Alfie," said the dark one.

"Got enough stuff to keep us for a week?" pursued Alfie. "Greens; we must have lettuce. Rob the trains," as Wezel shook his head. "The old priest over there has got it, I'll bet."

He and the three privates set themselves along the bench, wiping their glowing faces and necks. The dark man, standing, said quietly: "There are

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two of us officers and twenty men. The rest are coming along down the road with the Sergeant. We may be here a week."

He put on his blouse,—that of a Captain.

"Alfie, put on your blouse; you're too hot. Tell the men to put on theirs. We ain't used to this heat up north."

"I got one room taken, that's all," said Wezel. "He come on the train. I reckon you seen him."

"Good God, is he here?" cried Alfie, jumping up. "Where is he? Will I kick him when I get him? The scoundrel! A thin actor chump in a duster? That's the man. Oh, just wait. What the hell did he make us get off up there for?"

The privates added to the cursing.

"He wanted to get the best room," said Alfie, who was a Lieutenant, answering his own question.

"He's gone to see the priest," the Captain turned to explain to the other. "We'll have to wait till he gets back before we go there. I wonder who he can be?"

"I got his name in the book," said Wezel, blinking excitedly.

"Fetch it out," cried Alfie. "Trot along."

Wezel limped briskly in and got it.

"Joseph Dumain, S. J.," read the Captain. "What's 'S. J.'?"

"Society of Jesus. He's a damned Jesuit!"

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exclaimed Alfie. "He stopped us so as to give old Emanuelé warning."

"There's more in it than that," said the Captain, considering. "What good would that do? He'll know soon enough, anyway. Here he comes."

"Where is his dirty duster?" said Alfie. "He looks like a priest now, doesn't he?"

"Will you make your marks, gentlemen, while we wait?" said Wezel, offering the book. "He walks slower than he did before, when he was with me."

The Captain wrote:

"Capt. Dan Houghteling, U. S. A."

"Alfred Stange, U. S. A."

"You don't want the names of the men," he said.

"Put 'and twenty men,' " suggested Stange.

Wezel looked wistfully at Stange's good-natured young face.

"I've always had everybody's name what come to the hotel."

"Cameron'll write them down for you;" with his head he jerked the reassured innkeeper towards the seated soldiers.

As Cameron after some consultation with his comrades began with dignity to write, Stange turned to where the Jesuit was bowing to Houghteling.

The Captain bowed stiffly in return.

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"Captain Houghteling?" asked Dumain, affirmatively.

Alfie Stange, with a mocking salute cried, "Why the deuce did you dump us off back there for?"

Dumain looked inquiringly at Houghteling, who smiled and said nothing. After a moment he asked, complaisantly, "I suppose you make the same inquiry as Mr. Stange?"

"How does he know all our names?" said Alfie over his shoulder to Wezel; and then he cried to Dumain: "Of course, he does. Explain, old man."

Dumain took off his soft hat to wipe his forehead.

"In the first place," he said smiling, "being the oldest, I wanted the best room. And I am sure you wouldn't begrudge it to me if you saw it. Secondly," he went on, studying the Captain's set face, "I wanted to see the village Father, Emanuelé, first, before you came. But, as it happens in that, too, I am foiled. He is gone down the Valley for the afternoon."

"Serves you right," laughed Stange.

Houghteling's face continued black.

"But come," said Dumain briskly, "let us go inside where I can explain it all more fully. Will you come? Bring any of your—if you will. I don't know what confidence you place in your men."

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Houghteling shook his head impatiently.

"I wish the Sergeant was here," he said aloud to himself. "He has some good ideas."

"Perhaps Mr. Wezel will join us, too," continued Dumain. "I believe we may trust him."

Peter Wezel, hearing this, came limping along with the book.

"We were told so," said Stange; "which is more than we know about you."

Houghteling smiled grimly.

"So I understood," agreed Dumain unruffled, "I also was told that Mr. Wezel is,—I may say, —on our side."

He put his hand through Stange's arm as they went in. He was taller than Stange.

There was a large rough table in the rougher wooden room which untidily served as bar and parlor. The four silently took sides round it, Dumain opposite the Captain. Alfie's sword clanked against his chair-legs; Houghteling took his on his knees.

"First may I order a little whisky or something to drink on this hot day?" began Dumain cordially.

Wezel, jumping up with professional skill, retched a bottle and glasses.

"Some water, too," said Houghteling sharply.

No one spoke while the glasses were filling. When Wezel came last to Dumain, the Jesuit covered his glass with his hand and reached for

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the dirty water decanter. Alfie smiled. Houghteling pushed his glass of weak whisky and water from him. Alfie raised his eyebrows at nobody.

There was a long pause. Suddenly Alfie Stange reached for his glass; Wezel followed his example. Both took deep draughts just as Dumain began to say to the Captain: "It is just as well to keep one's head clear."

Then he began, leaning over the table and speaking somewhat as if he were addressing a large audience: "Gentlemen, as you probably know, I am a Jesuit. It is unnecessary to say how my superiors came to know you were being sent down here in regard to the reported trouble at San Rafael. Probably such a movement, though your numbers are small, is not altogether to be kept a secret. Anyway, I dare say, if a demonstration in that village is prevented it will satisfy you as well as if one is made and put down."

"Oh, I don't know," mumbled Alfie. "There are no others."

Houghteling looked unrelaxing. Dumain watched him narrowly for a minute, and then said directly to Wezel, who was at one side, "To be sure it has been said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And of course, I do not know what your plans may be; but it seems to me that it would be a great deal more

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effective to let the Penitentes get to the point almost of their ceremony and then to stop them in the act, than merely to prevent them by your presence. For you might have to do that every year; and the other would break up the affair forever. The Archbishop,—I may say the Holy Father himself, for in the church even a detail so remote is considered important,— the Archbishop fully sympathizes with the Governmental desire to stamp out this superstitious practice, however it is to be done; and that is why I am here."

"Why doesn't the Holy Father stamp it out in Mexico?" demanded Alfie. "There's plenty of crucifying there."

Dumain merely glanced at Stange and went on, to Houghteling: "So in order that——"

"That's a rather good point of Lieutenant Stange's," Houghteling interrupted. "How about Mexico?"

Alfie smiled pertly at the priest. Wezel seemed most interested in occasional sips of whisky.

Quite unruffled, Dumain explained: "Of course, the initiative of the Government is needed, which is quite wanting in Mexico, so far as opposition to the criminal rites of the Penitentes goes. The church militant is not extant in this century, except metaphorically. But really, this is a side issue. It is a fact, if you will believe it, that my superior officers have sent me down here

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for no other purpose than to assist you, if you will let me."

"Quite without any desire on the part of our superior officers, I suppose," replied Houghteling coldly.

"I don't know," answered the other simply, "very likely with some understanding. I don't inquire into my superiors' reasons. I obey orders."

"So do I," retorted Houghteling; "and I have none about you."

"Don't be a fool, Dan," cried Stange.

"Don't you be insubordinate, young man," said the Captain, with his first real smile.

"I suppose you are here with some warrant to exercise your discretion," said Dumain calmly. "Otherwise I will not inquire into your plans. At least, until we are on terms of confidence."

"I don't suppose," replied Houghteling with more openness than he had yet shown, "that if we did take you into our confidence and you betrayed it, that you could prevent our doing what we came for. Either the San Rafaelers would get scared and give up their performance, which is just what we want; or even if they didn't, you could hardly raise an armed force to prevent our preventing them; safely."

He looked inquiringly at Alfie.

Dumain said, "I should think that is so."

"Oh, we ought to fight," said Alfie seriously.

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"After coming all the way to this hole, the best thing we can do is to encourage them to go on with their little circus and then waltz up and clean them out and stop it forever."

"Certainly I should say that's the best plan to pursue," agreed Dumain.

Wezel ventured his first remark. "Naturally," he said.

"I don't say that a little firing of rifles mightn't be the surest way to scare them into decency for a few years," said Houghteling; "but I don't understand that my orders are to proceed on that basis; and so I do not intend to."

"Well, whatever lines you decide to proceed on," replied Dumain, "I shall help you all I can. All you will let me, that is; for I assure you that I am here for no other purpose. Here is a letter I have to Father Emanuelé from my superiors." He took it out and put it on the rough table, in front of Houghteling. "I dare say you are going there to see him yourself——"

"Yes," said Stange promptly.

"I see no need of it," said Houghteling. "Of course, I shall send word to the Penitentes themselves that we are here."

"Of course," said Dumain.

"I think we ought to see the old man," Stange insisted in a joking tone.

"Then go and see him yourself," said Houghteling.

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"What damn nonsense!"

"At all events," began Dumain, "it will do no harm for me to stir him up about it, too, and get him to send them a warning message, which may have more effect in making them desist than yours. From what I hear they are a stubborn fool-hardy folk, and crafty. You can trust me to do all I can,—that is, if you can trust me."

He held out his hand to Stange who was next him. Alfie jumped up with rattling sword and gave it a good grasp. "You might as well shake hands with a man, if he is bound to be on your side," he said.

The Captain also stood up. He took the letter, which was unsealed, slowly opened it, and though it was short, read it as slowly. When he had given it back to the priest, he said: "If you will go out now, I will join you in a minute. Or I will go——" but the priest had gone.

Wezel, having finished his second glass, went too, limping more than ever. Houghteling shut the door and put his hand on Alfie's shoulder, who stood in front of him.

"What do you think, Alf?"

"Why, he's all right," said Alfie. "What harm can he do? I don't see what the devil they sent him here for, but——"

"That's the trouble," said Houghteling. "I don't know what harm he can do, but I am suspicious of him. He may be up to something

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we have no idea of. However, I have got no cause to arrest him; so I suppose the best I can do is to let him be, but to keep an eye on him."

"Yes, damn it all!" agreed Alfie.

"Shall I telegraph to his—to the Archbishop?"

"To the Pope! Don't be a fool. You said yourself he couldn't hurt."

"Yes; but he's a Jesuit. Shall I telegraph for orders?"

"And sewer yourself. If you don't, this business will do your work for you, and you'll be a General yet, old man. Run it all yourself, and I'll back you. Only I should like a little fight."

"I shouldn't," said Houghteling. "Come on."

Stange put his arm round his Captain's shoulder, for the moment they were in the dark hallway.

"I don't half like him; he insulted us both," said Houghteling.

"Gad! you're more touchy than if you'd been a proper West Pointer yourself," retorted Stange.

Houghteling walked up to the Jesuit and held out his hand to him in the sight of all the soldiers and the others. Dumain shook it very cordially.

"I think I must go over to the priest again and find out what is going on," said he; "he is certainly back by this time. We haven't any time to lose, I suppose. Will you send notice to the Penitentes this evening?"

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"No, to-morrow morning will be time enough, I should think," answered Houghteling with a side glance at him. "I'll wait to hear your report. When is San Rafael's day?"

"Next Monday, you know."

Houghteling nodded.

Stange, who had been watching a cloud of dust approach along the distant road, announced, "They are coming."

The others looked into the glare.

"You haven't so very many men," said Dumain, as he started off.

"You ought to get the Saints to help you," exclaimed Wezel, suddenly waking for a moment.

Dumain paused. "You mean the Mormons." Then he walked away.

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XXI

FAY GRADY

THE same afternoon that the soldiers came to Antonito there was acted in the kitchen of Father Emanuelé's house a scene of a sort that was becoming too frequent there. Father Emanuelé's sister having finished a pious and solitary prayer at her prie-dieu in her own room, glided thinly down stairs,—the priest's house, like the hotel, and like no other house in Antonito, has two stories,—and on to the kitchen. At the door she stopped abruptly to gaze in, in horror; for all Señorita Tecla's emotions were raised a few degrees above the normal. In the middle of the large room, through which blew a gentle and pleasant breeze, she saw, with hand on the very crank of the horizontal barrel-churn, and her plump figure in its shining green gown nearly rolling off the chair, Fay Grady sound asleep.

Emanuelé, when he first came to the cure of Antonito, had brought with him his blooming young sister. Thin and wavy even then, there were still to be found very old people with enough justice to admit that she had been pretty in a cold un-Spanish way, not the way admired in the San Luis Valley. As the pious spinster

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lived on from year to year and yet to other years, she had become, though without making a friend, the ideal of etiquette in Antonito, and even farther north than La Jara, and over east into Las Animas County across the Sangre de Cristo range. The worst one could say of her was that she was stingy and cross.

During these decades she had spun among her maids,—to use a metaphor, for she never spun, and her one maid had invariably been old and ugly—till, a few months before, having to replace the third defunct duenna, she had allowed her charity and her sense of the need of propaganda to be so worked on that she attached to her a young Mormon girl from the neighboring saintly village of Manassa. It may be imagined what confusion a lazy young heathen Irish girl induced in Señorita Tecla's conventionalized domestic economy.

When, therefore, she now saw Fay Grady dozing at her task, Tecla fairly swam down the two steps that led into the kitchen and dealt the lazy one a good box on the ear. While she was raising her prayer-book to strike again, Fay jumped up, almost upsetting the churn and quite upsetting the chair, which rattled loudly on the wooden floor.

"That's right! Deafen the Father!" choked Tecla. Having been bred in an Eastern convent she spoke English better than Spanish.

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Fay gazed at her rather stupidly with her intensely gray eyes. Then she drawled: "The Father's gone to Conejos."

"Why are you neglecting your work?" demanded Tecla hotly.

"I don't know," said Fay. "Guess I must 'a' been sleepy."

"Don't answer back. How often have I told you? Go on with your churning; and then you will have to read some to me. Hurry up; go on."

Fay was slow of motion for eighteen. However, she got the creaking crank started round again, while Tecla sat down opposite, one finger in her book, and listened grimly to the chunking swish of the milk. Fay, for some time, with vacant eyes, turned the monotonous handle. Tecla opened her book and read one prayer. Then she said so suddenly that the plump girl gave a start: "Let me hear you say your letters, Fay Grady."

Fay immediately began, "A, B. C," and speaking very deliberately, four letters to each revolution of the big churn, ended the alphabet without any mistake. There was no complaint for Tecla to make, except, "You'll have to learn them faster. But I expect your mind is slow. It's taken me a good while teaching you that little bit."

Fay was silent. At last she said, looking over

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from her task: "Can I go to Manassa this afternoon?"

"Not till your work is done, I told you," answered the spinster sharply.

Fay looked meek. She always looked meek when she wasn't laughing.

"I suppose you want to go over to see your aunt and your little sister."

"No," said guileless Fay; "I thought I'd go to the Wivverses. I told Naphtali I'd come over to-day. You said I could."

"Fay Grady, you ought to be ashamed to say such a thing."

"It's so," said Fay simply, changing arms.

"I believe it would be gracious to lie about it then. You can't marry that man. I won't let you go till all your work is finished."

The Señorita had a watch. She referred to it now.

"I don't know as I do want to be his second wife," observed Fay; "but he's a elder. At least he's the most of a elder in Manassa."

"Among heathen!" added the mistress. "It's bad enough to be first wife to one of them. But it's shameful and wicked to think of being second. And I won't have it! You were put here with me to get a good home and righteous instruction. And I won't let you be running off with such people. And besides it's illegal, too."

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"Well, I know other things," began Fay monotonously, "that's just as illegal as that. An' you like 'em. There's San Rafael."

Tecla held in her anger till she was able to speak steadily.

"You don't know anything about Christian practices."

"No, I don't;" said Fay quite innocently and a trifle bored, "and I don't want to. I'm a Mormon," she added.

After this for some time there was silence, except for the swashing of the milk and Tecla's hard breathing. Then the churn creaked.

"Is the butter coming?" asked Tecla.

"I reckon it's come," answered Fay, opening the churn.

She stretched her tired arm.

"Now, I'll have you read a little," began Tecla, opening her book at random and handing it to Fay.

The girl, taking it quietly, began to run one fat finger along the lines of print. Occasionally she would stop an instant, look harder at the page, and call out, always on the same note, "A," or "an," or "the," or "B. V. M." As these four were the only words Fay could read, the recital, after a page or two, became, even to the teacher, tiresome. But she could not understand the girl's own dislike of the proceeding. To her the familiar prayers were very beautiful.

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After a while she said, "That will do now. It's queer you don't learn faster."

Fay closed the book and jumped up really quickly.

"You have on your green gown," proclaimed the mistress.

"I know it."

"I suppose that was because you intended going over to let that Morman man see you."

"My other one's tore," drawled Fay.

"Where?"

"I caught it on the pump."

"Then you must set to work and mend it," said Tecla firmly.

"Now?" asked the girl disheartened.

"To be sure. Now. If you were so careless to tear it."

"Then I can't go to Manassa."

"I don't see how you can," she nodded grimly.

Fay made no protest.

Just then came a knocking at the front door, which could be plainly heard in the kitchen. It was seldom any one used the front knocker. Tecla told Fay to run and see who was there.

"I guess he's back to see the Father," said Fay; "what will I say?"

"Well, you know he's not at home."

"No, I don't," said Fay, stopping. "I seen him come in on his donkey a while ago."

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"See if he's in the study, then; and let the visitor in there. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't think of it," drawled Fay; "I was readin'."

Then she went out.

After a few minutes she came back. Tecla was still sitting in the same chair. The girl stopped at the foot of the steps and asked slowly, "Will I get the dress?"

"Yes, of course. Get it right away and bring it here."

Fay went ponderously up the three steps again and disappeared.

It was not long before she returned again with the torn skirt. Fay knew how to do some things; and as she started her mending, so deftly that her mistress at least, for once could not criticise,—Tecla began in an acridly pathetic tone: "I hope you will soon be converted, Fay Grady. Your soul is very hardened. Here you live right under the Father's influence and mine——"

"I don't want to be converted," said Fay dispassionately; "I was converted once and I don't expect I will be converted any more. I don't want to be. I was eight years old when I was converted."

"And to think that before that you were a Christian!"

"The Saints is good enough," replied Fay

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quietly. Then she exclaimed, more suddenly than was her wont: "This red thread's all used up."

And before the Señorita had made any protest, the girl had taken up her sun hat off the table, and was out the open back door into the hot sunshine.

Tecla was not inquisitive. Where she sat was in easy call if her brother wished her for anything. She opened her book and began to read her prayers.

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XXII

PRIEST MEETS PRIEST

WHEN Dumain left the soldiers at the hotel he went again down the few hundred yards of dusty hot road that led past the scattering adobe houses of Antonito to the church on the other side of the street. The yellow church, with its rather well-outlined, Mexican-looking façade, faced directly on the road. The broad clerical house next had a garden in front. At one side the house abutted on the church, but so far back that an inside door from Emanuelé's study, a front room, led immediately into the sacristy behind the chancel.

Dumain crossed the sparse, but semi-tropical garden to the front door, where it was cool in the shade. Though the door was open, he knocked with the great iron knocker. This time he was answered after a minute or so by a fat girl in shiny green, who pointed to a closed door and said, "Go in there."

Dumain, opening the door for himself, went into a large, half-dark, inhabited-looking room. At one end a fat priest in a black gown lay back resting in an easy chair. As Dumain came in, he sat up straight.

"You will pardon me for not knocking," said

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the Jesuit; "but your servant directed me to come in."

The fat priest stood up, and gazed at him in stupid silence.

"This will explain my coming."

Dumain offered him the letter. Holding it near his eyes, the priest read as follows, mumbling the words:

"To Father Emanuelé Miero in Antonito,—
"Our beloved Father,—
"This will be brought to you by our confidential servant Father Joseph Dumain.
"In all things he is in our confidence and merits yours.
"We will not deny that his errand has some special connection with the parish of San Rafael.
"The Grace of God be with you.
"Ignatius Stanley, S. J."

The letter was neither dated nor headed.

After reading it, Father Emanuelé rather aimlessly gave Dumain his large soft hand. He seemed confused.

"I have been up to Conejos today to give Extreme Unction," he began; "I rode such a long way. It was very sad," he rambled on. "Will you sit down? I have not been very well."

Dumain sat opposite, and looked steadily at the broad, sallow face.

At last Emanuelé went on in his thick voice,

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"It is something to do with San Rafael; with the Stigmata. Will you have some wine?"

Getting up feebly he fetched from a large sideboard a decanter of red liquor and two small glasses.

"Cherry-brandy," he announced absent-mindedly, as he sat down again.

This time Dumain did not refuse to drink.

"It has something to do with San Rafael," the host began again, choking over his brandy. "Then you have come down to see it? You are interested in it? It is a beautiful custom."

Dumain said nothing.

"I am glad you are interested in it. It has always appealed deeply to me. To receive the Stigmata—," with an effort he rose and went into a dark corner of the room.

Coming back, he continued: "To receive the sacred Stigmata is not given to every one. She received them." He showed a large photograph of Carpaccio's painting in Dresden. "That is Saint Catherine of Sienna. She received them; all seven, the marks in the hands and in the feet and the spear thrust and the marks on the brow. But it is not granted to many."

"It was a miracle in her case," remarked Dumain.

"Yes, it was a holy miracle with Saint Catherine, and others have been vouchsafed it, too. Saint Francis and others. It is a miracle here,

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too," he added; "here at San Rafael. When they do not die, it is a miracle."

Dumain looked unusually grave.

"It is a miracle, however, not smiled upon by the Government in this country. You know the conferring of these Stigmata is illegal."

Father Emanuelé looked intently at him. He was extracting two cigars from a pocket in the skirt of his robe. One he offered to his visitor; the other he lighted with a trembling match.

"It is a pity," he sighed, laying down his cigar after one puff, "that everybody cannot sympathize with us in our deeper feelings."

"It is a pity," agreed the Jesuit.

Emanuelé shook his head sadly and contemplatively.

Dumain began again:

"Some soldiers came down on the train with me."

Emanuelé considered before he asked: "Where were they going? To Cripple Creek probably."

"No, they got off here," answered the other.

"Then— About the Mormons?"

"No, I think about San Rafael."

Emanuelé gazed at him helplessly.

"I told you the Government does not approve of the crucifixion."

The old man kept staring blankly at him.

"Where are the soldiers staying?" he asked.

"At the hotel."

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The priest was silent a moment.

Then: "It is a liberal Government. It has never interfered before," he said.

"It has threatened."

"I have heard of that," said Father Emanuelé, with the quiet air of a disinterested person. "I suppose there are a great many."

"No, not very many. Two officers and only twenty or thirty men. The whole movement seems to me a little unusual in its plans."

"It must be very inconvenient for you," said Emanuelé; "you will come here and stay."

"I have a room at the hotel, quite good enough. I thank you."

"You had better come and stay here."

"I wouldn't trouble you, Father."

"No, no," protested the Father, "I should like to have you here. It's the usual way."

"To tell you the truth," said Dumain, "I was sent down here expressly because it was known the soldiers were coming; and it was thought—to be sure we had no way of telling—but it was thought," he said slowly, "that they were coming to prevent the ceremony at San Rafael. So I think it will be better for me to stay at the hotel. They are not at all offensive; and I may be able to discover something of their plans, which may be of use to you. You know that we Jesuits pride ourselves on being diplomats. And it may even be that I

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shall conceal my being a Jesuit and work myself into their confidence. So you see, I had better stay there for the present."

Father Emanuelé made no protest.

"But," Dumain proceeded, "if it wouldn't be any trouble to you to put a room at my disposal, I might find occasion to use it. For you know it may turn out that the expedition is against the Mormons after all. We have heard up north some rumors of polygamous marriages."

"Yes," assented the priest, "our maid-servant ——" He paused; Dumain waited.

"Our own servant, who belongs, sadly enough, to the heathenish creed, I am ashamed to say,—the girl is engaged to marry a so-called Saint in one of the neighboring towns, who already has one wife."

"It is very dreadful!" acquiesced Dumain.

"Yes, very dreadful! The young woman is of good people from Georgia; Irish people, poor but worthy, who were perverted when she was a child. Fay,—the family's name was Grady,—Fay is thinking of becoming the second wife,—concubine I call it,—of this adulterous person in Manassa."

"The soldiers may well have been sent, as you say, for putting down such scandalous doings. What do you say the man's name is?"

"His name,"—the priest considered. "Let me

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see; I know his name. Oh, yes, Wivvers,—something Wivvers. It is some Biblical name,—the shocking creatures pretend to reverence Holy Scripture. What a ridiculous pretence!"

But he couldn't remember the name.

After this he sat for some time in dazed silence, smoking his cigar. At last Dumain said: "What must we do, then, about the ceremony at San Rafael? If the soldiers prove to have come for that?"

"Oh, in that case it must be abandoned. Certainly. Yes," he said. "I will write to them to abandon it myself."

"In that way you will frustrate the soldiers."

"Yes, and of course, no harm must come to those pious folk up there. I should hate to have one of them suffer."

"I can't help thinking," says Dumain, standing up, "that my superiors must have been mistaken. What you tell me makes me feel almost sure that their coming here must be intended against these law-breaking Mormons. This is the nearest Christian town to Manassa, isn't it?"

It happens that it is; which Emanuelé told him.

"And the people in San Rafael have been so happy and so engrossed in preparing for their beautiful fête," the fat old priest went on in his hoarse voice. "This is one of the few parishes in all America where the Stigmata are ever be-

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stowed. The noble young man who is to undertake it has been fasting for weeks and continually carrying his cross tied on his back. But many do that, and they have a good priest, Father Maria de Jesus. He is impetuous, but so noble. They are all impetuous,—they are half-breeds; yet more religious, I sometimes think, than many of us of full blood."

Dumain listened with interest to this outpouring from the heart. When it ended, he asked: "How do the people hereabouts regard this festival at San Rafael? Do they sympathize? Are the men for it with their souls?"

"Most of our men here in Antonito and generally all through the Valley, excepting the Mormons and the people of San Rafael, are gone to Cripple Creek."

"But there must be some left."

"Only enough to work the ranches and get in the crops; and not enough really for that. They work very hard. But I fear they are mostly indifferent," he shook his head mournfully.

"Ah, well," exclaimed Dumain, "we can only pray! I must go for the present," he added. "You will show me the room?"

Father Emanuelé moved painfully to the door and called hoarsely for his sister.

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XXIII

STANGE'S ADVICE

SOON after Dumain had left the hotel to go to the priest's house the second time, the rest of the soldiers, under command of a Sergeant, had arrived. Captain Houghteling, taking the Sergeant and Peter Wezel with him, had gone inside to see about their accommodations. Most of the men had also gone in. But the three soldiers who had arrived before stayed on the bench in the comfortable shade; and Lieutenant Stange also remained tilting back in a chair near them.

Suddenly he took his cigarette from his mouth, let his chair down on four legs, and cried, "By George, here comes a girl!—and a white girl! and a young girl! This is the first young, white girl I've laid eyes on since I landed in this cursed Valley!—this morning," he added.

It was Fay in her green gown.

"Irish, I should say, by the color of her," remarked one of the soldiers.

"Come here, girl," Alfie called to her, "and let me take your picture."

Fay Grady stood still in the middle of the sandy road and shouted back, "I guess I don't want to be took."

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Then she started on again.

"Well come on over, anyway," called Alfie; and she turned and began to come. "I can't take your picture, because I haven't got any kodak. She's got red cheeks, too," he said aloud to himself, twisting his yellow mustache.

The three soldiers stared with all their six eyes at Fay Grady. As she came near Stange, he jumped up.

"What's your name, my girl?" he asked.

"My name's Fay Grady."

"I knew you weren't Spanish," said Alfie promptly; and all the soldiers laughed.

They had got up too.

"Stand away from Miss Grady, all you men," said Alfie. "Don't you know better than to crowd a lady?"

The men went back and sat down again on the bench, where they made remarks to one another in a low tone.

"The Lieut.'s a bird with the girls," said one.

"He's had practice," concurred another

Then they listened to see what would come next.

"Why shouldn't I escort you wherever you are going?" Alfie was proposing. "Come on."

"I was going to buy some thread," drawled Fay, without moving, and looking up at an open window where Houghteling could be dimly seen.

"Don't look up there. Look at me. I'm the

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Captain, and I'm a sight better looking than he is."

"Don't you believe him," said one of the soldiers under his breath; but Stange heard him.

"Shut up, you fellows," he cried sharply.

The men laughed a little: but they shut up.

"I was a-goin' to Manassa," says Fay; "but I wasn't let."

"And where may Manassa be?"

"Over there," indicated Fay, pointing; "where the Saints live."

"And what the hell,—I mean, what are you going over where the Saints live for?"

"I'm a Saint," said Fay Grady.

One of the men on the bench, the middle one, giggled; and the other two punched him.

Just then, the Captain, putting his head out the window above them, said: "Can you come up here, Alfie?"

Stange looked up at him.

"Is it a command or a request?" he asked.

"Why, a request," replied Houghteling, shortly.

"Then I shan't come up just yet."

The head quickly disappeared.

"He would 'a' run as quick as any of us," one of the men observed to the others, "if he had called it a command."

"Yes; but he's got privileges with the Captain," said one of the others, who was older.

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"He understands discipline good enough," said the third. "I wisht I could 'a' went to West Point myself."

"The Captain never did," remarked the other young one; "he riz."

"And a damn sight better man, I say," held the old one.

"Come off!" retorted the first speaker. "He's got the head, maybe, but not the way with him."

Then they stopped. When one is healthy, a conversation in asides is too wearing to keep up long.

In the meanwhile Stange had asked Fay why she mightn't go to Manassa, and she had answered that she "dassn't, 'cause" Miss Tecla wouldn't let her; but that she was going anyway. And on his inquiry why she wouldn't let her, Fay had recounted with commendable fulness, that her mistress was the Father's sister, and wanted to convert her, and didn't want her to be Naphtali Wivvers's second wife.

"And you want to be, I suppose."

"I ain't sure. He's pretty rich, and he's a elder. But I don't want to be nobody's second wife."

"Why not?"

"The first one thinks she's better than you are."

"Good God!" exclaimed Stange. "I thought the first one was dead."

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"Oh, no," said Fay; "but she's been joined to him six years."

"Oh, I see, that's almost as good. But are you in love with him?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Fay, in her provokingly slow way. "I guess I am. I like him well enough; anyhow, I don't like no one no better."

"Don't you marry any man you aren't in love with, or at least think you are. That's my advice."

"I ain't in love with nobody," retorted Fay, in her drawl.

"Well, you will be some day."

"I'd marry him quick enough if I could be his first wife," she declared.

"You stick to that," said Alfie; "the last may be first, you know; and perhaps you will be. I shouldn't wonder if he'd trun the other one over if you'd wait a while." He puffed a cigarette he was lighting. "Six years already:—he must be pretty tired of her. Do they have divorces in your church? But I advise you to get a handsome man. Is he—What's his name?—Is he handsome?"

"His name is Wivvers," drawled Fay.

"Is he handsome?"

"I guess he's handsome enough for me," she said.

"Oh, now, Miss Grady; you don't appreciate

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yourself." Fay was not used to being called Miss Grady. "I have seen women in Denver, and even farther away, who resorted to expedients,"—he gesticulated with his cigarette to denote the expedients,—"to have cheeks as red as yours. Is he as handsome as I am?"

Fay looked at him as though she had not yet thought of his appearance.

Stange threw out his chest and folded his arms at "parade rest."

"No," she said, "I guess he ain't."

"Well, then, you'd better not marry him till I'm gone, anyhow."

Fay looked at him again and said, "I don't see what difference that makes."

Stange laughed.

"No," he agreed; "it doesn't."

Then he said into his yellow mustache, "But, damn it! Maybe it will."

While they were talking together in the road, Dumain, returning from the priest's house, passed them and went into the hotel, without their particularly noticing him. The three privates had also left their bench as the declining sun began to shine into their eyes, and gone in.

Houghteling looking again out of his upper window, called shortly, "Alfie, come up here."

"Good-bye," said Stange, starting at once. "Be good. I'll see you again."

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Fay stood where she was till he entered the door. Then she moved on to do her original errand, and did not see his salute to her from the doorway.

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XXIV

DIPLOMACY

STANGE sauntered into the upper room with his cigarette. Houghteling and the Sergeant were sitting by a table on which lay a large, dirty map of Colorado. As soon as Stange appeared, Dumain began, "He says he must send word to them to give up the affair."

"Good!" exclaimed the Captain.

"Then you positively do not intend that they shall go on with the crucifixion?" says Dumain.

"Oh, we must have a crucifixion," said Alfie. "I've never seen one."

"I positively do not," answered Houghteling. "I thought I had made that understood. Isn't that what you told him?"

"To be sure," Dumain nodded.

"We're not sent here, as I understand my orders, to clean out this village,—unless, of course, they're stubborn and we have to,—but to stop the crucifixion this year. Next year, they can send again. It's a very small village; the custom will probably die out soon along with the inhabitants. Besides, even if I felt at liberty to try the other plan, I shouldn't. Suppose there was some slip. How should we feel? Think of this whole business! They lug round heavy crosses for weeks first, then when the day

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comes, if they're not dead, they nail each other up on them."

There was a pause.

"It must be disagreeable," Alfie said, "to have nails through the palms of your hands."

"Gentlemen," began Dumain, "I don't like the idea personally any better than you do; personally. But the sure way to stop it forever seems to me to be to stop it *in flagrante delictu.* Of course, before the victim is dead, if possible."

"Just after he's tacked up," glossed Alfie.

"Then you have a specific crime. That's what the Archbishop thinks."

"The Archibishop be hanged!" cried Alfie. "I want it to go on more than he does. I've never seen a crucifixion, and I'm made to fight. But I'm not going to let it go on, and don't you think you are. Because it is my duty," he added, thrusting his hand into his bosom like Napoleon.

"If you have told the priest our plans," began Houghteling, "I don't see how we could make them go on now, if we did want to."

"I might easily persuade him that I had been mistaken about your plans," said Dumain. "He's a simple old soul, half sick. He felt sure at first you had come down against the Mormons."

Wezel, coming in at this instant with a kerosene lamp, exclaimed: "Why, the Mormons will help us!"

"So you said before, old man," cried Stange.

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"I did not wish to upset him too much all at once," Dumain pursued, glancing over his shoulder at Wezel and the lamp; "so I did not put the meaning of your presence here so forcibly as I, of course, shall when I go back, directly; now that I know your plans are fixed."

Houghteling gazed at him steadily with tight shut mouth.

"He is strongly impressed," Dumain went on, crossing his long thin legs and turning to lean his arm on his chair back, "with the idea how shocking and illegal their polygamous marriages are."

"That's where he's just right," asserted Stange. "I'm preventing one myself."

"It appears they are still common," Dumain went on, not regarding the interruption. "His own servant-girl is being enticed into one."

"That's the one," said Stange.

"And he would be easily convinced that you had been sent to help the Government stamp out this surreptitious practice."

"You ought to get the Saints to help you," persisted Wezel.

"Why? Are they so opposed to the Penitentes?" Dumain turned so quickly upon him that he jumped.

"Opposed! I should say so," he said, blinking his one good eye. "They hate all Catholics like poison. You ought to get them."

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"We don't need help," said the Captain shortly.

"How many men are there at San Rafael?" Dumain asked complaisantly, addressing Wezel. "Not more than twenty, I'm told."

"Twenty?" repeated Wezel. "I guess not. And some of them old men and boys. But they'd fight like panthers."

"Well, what can they do against twenty soldiers with guns?" demanded Alfie; "and officers with guns, too," touching a holster lying on the table.

"I only thought if you had more," explained Wezel, "you wouldn't kill so many. I suppose you don't want to kill too many."

"I wish,——" Houghteling began, impatiently.

"No, not too many," said Alfie; "they're not Indians."

"It wouldn't hurt to kill a few," said Wezel; "they're half-breeds."

"I wish you would all understand," cried Houghteling, pounding on the table, "that we won't kill one. We are going to occupy their town, prevent their orgy, and go home."

He stopped, frowning. The Jesuit turned down the darkly smoking lamp.

Finally he said placatingly: "I think we all do understand, Captain. And since it is your decision, I at least shall do all I can to support it."

Houghteling frowned fixedly at him.

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"Still, it seems to me that Mr. Wezel's idea about the Mormons is excellent. Why not send them word why you are here? Isn't it policy for an armed force to be on good and well-defined terms with all parties about?"

"Nonsense!" muttered Houghteling.

"I hope not, sir," smiled Dumain. "I can't see the harm in being on good terms with everyone. And it might be awkward if they got the impression you had been sent on their account. This servant is one of their sect, and—news travels so mysteriously."

He stood up.

"Mormons are peaceable cultivators, when let alone," said Houghteling grimly. "I'll trust to their not making any counter disturbance."

"Naphtali Wivvers ain't no sech peaceful cultivator," wheezed Wezel. "He's the peaceful kind that carries two guns in their belt. I'd a sight rather have his gang on my side than on the other."

"I've not the slightest fear of it," snapped Houghteling, nervously fingering on the table.

Dumain considered: "Wivvers. Why, that's the man that wants to marry the servant girl."

"You bet it is," cried Stange; "and marry her he shall, and in return he'll be our ally. I'll persuade her."

Houghteling jumped up angrily and went over

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to the window where he stood with his back to the others.

"But he has one wife," the Jesuit objected; "we should be helping break God's laws and the Government's."

"Damn the Government! Aren't we here fighting for the Government? We're not sent to suppress polygamy, whatever the old parson thought."

"Alfie," said Houghteling, turning towards them, "I hope you don't think you're talking seriously. It's adultery."

"Would it persuade Wivvers?" considered Dumain.

Houghteling gave him a black look under his eyebrows.

"If Naphtali needed persuadin' to worry the Penitentes, I swear that would do it. But can Lieutenant Stange persuade the girl? She's a slow creature, but mighty sot."

"Don't you worry," Alfie reassured him. "She and I are bosom friends. I told her not to marry him and she said she wouldn't. Now I'll tell her to, and I'm blest if she won't, just to break my heart. As to it's being adultery, I say it's a plain case of good, old-fashioned concubinage. And there's warrant for that in the Bible, isn't there?" he asked Dumain.

"I don't pretend to excuse it," gravely replied Dumain. "My only warrant is that good may

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come of this evil. I am here to aid you, and that's my first duty. Besides, the Mormons are not Christians; and so their sin is at least not a mock of religion like the fanatical celebration at San Rafael."

"If it's as serious as all that," said Stange, gravely, "I hope you don't blame the poor girl. She won't be doing anything she thinks wrong."

"I have scarcely seen the girl yet," replied Dumain. He stepped to the door, and as he opened it, said: "I shall probably see you down stairs later,—at supper, I hope."

He paused a moment. Houghteling said nothing.

"Sure!" Alfie called after him as he shut the door.

"Could you go down and get us some sort of supper?" Houghteling then asked Wezel.

As soon as the landlord had limped from the vilely lighted room, Houghteling came from the window towards the Sergeant and Stange, who leaned back and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"I mistrust that man altogether," began the Captain. "Why do you suppose he wants us to make this Mormon treaty?"

"I guess he actually thinks we need some help," Alfie surmised pleasantly. "Priests don't know anything about——"

"I feel positive he's up to some mischief," said Houghteling.

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"I agree with you, sir," said the Sergeant. "He's too smooth spoken."

"The thing to do now is to send to the Mormons and make the arrangement."

"What!" cried Alfie. "Play into his hand, if he has got some little game?"

"What is his game? That's the trouble," complained the Captain. "He seems to give away all his schemes and yet you can't get on to them. The only thing I can see in this is that he wants to embroil us with these wild Saints; supposing him a hypocrite and really trying to help the San Rafaelers get their show through. It'd be just the thing for them to have us with the Mormons on our hands the day of the performance. So I'm going to send for this man Wivvers and put it to him plainly,—tell him we don't expect to fight, but we'd like his moral support if things miscarry and force us to. That's simple."

"Simple as can be," chimed Alfie, beginning to whistle.

"In the morning I'll send a message up to the Penitente priest, too; and then I don't see how this Jesuit gentleman, who insists on helping, can help us do anything we don't want to do."

"Trun down for old Dumain," Alfie remarked.

"And as for this business about marrying the girl to Wivvers," added Houghteling, "it's foolishness, of course."

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"Oh, I don't know," replied Alfie. "I find it rather diverting to try my hand at match-making."

"Better drop it," said the other shortly, leaving the room.

Alfie got up, laughing, and followed him.

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XXV

A SAINT AMONG SAINTS

AT THE priest's house, supper was very early. This evening it took Fay Grady so short a time to wash the dishes that before it had been dark many minutes she had finished. A full moon was already doing much to make it undark again out of doors. Fay, who was alone in the kitchen, took off her apron, and smoothing her shining brown hair away from the part with both hands, she advanced, with a good deal of briskness for so solid a young woman, up the three little steps and into the front hall.

At the closed door of the study, where Tecla had carried her sick brother's supper to him, she paused to listen. All was silent within. Going up stairs for her hat, she stopped at Señorita Tecla's room to look for her. Not having found her there, she was nearly downstairs again, when the study door opened and from it issued her angular mistress, who opened her thin lips to demand: "Where are you going at this time of night, Fay Grady?"

"Home," said Fay with a note of forbearance; "you said I could when I got everything done."

"I grieve to hear you call that heathen town

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home, when you have a good Catholic home here," responded the mistress. "Is your dress finished?"

"Yes'm," answered Fay, humble but firm.

"And the dishes?"

"The dishes, too," drawled Fay with a little sigh, and taking a slow step towards the open front door.

Tecla looked severely at her as she moved out.

"How are you going to get there?" she demanded.

"Mr. Davis said he'd loan me his buggy, when I was down to the store," said the girl deliberately and disinterestedly.

"Well, mind you're home by——" she consulted her watch,—"seven,—" she calculated; "half-past nine. Mind, that's an hour each way and half an hour to stay. Tell your aunt to come and see me; and you tell that Wivvers man," —she raised her thin voice as Fay withdrew,— "that he is a shameless creature, and never to dare again to come near this house. Do you hear?"

"Yes," came the long-drawn answer from out of doors.

Fay was out in the night.

As she passed the hotel, there was a light in an upper room, where she could catch sight of two or three men. She walked even slower than usual; but no one saw her. At the store, across

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the railway tracks, she got the promised buggy. A solitary ten-mile drive across the prairie land, which was all one dull, tawny, sleepy color under the monotonous moonlight, brought her to the Mormon settlement. As she neared the hamlet of Manassa, silent fields of alfalfa and wheat seemed suddenly to spring up; and the narrow irrigating ditches running between them would light up and glimmer in the moonlight, and then seem to go out again, as she drove past.

Finally came a wide street bounded by square frame houses, unpainted and looking dead and dreary in the half-light. Before one of these she drew up her horse with a "whoa," and having plumped a round iron weight on a strap down near his feet, she went up on the porch and opened the door.

It led into an ugly but fairly neat sitting-room, with a dingy parlor-organ in one corner. A weary-looking woman in a gray-figured calico wrapper and holding a baby, rocked vigorously in one chair; and in another a very large, bearded man sat smoking a strong pipe and reading a Bible. Neither got up.

"Good evenin', Fay," said the woman in a gentle, tired voice, stopping her rocking for a moment.

"Good evenin', Sarah," replied Fay, coughing a little with the smoke. "How-de-do, Mr. Wivvers."

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Wivvers had already cried, "Hello, Fay!" in a loud, rough voice, as soon as he saw her.

Taking his pipe out, he motioned with his head peremptorily to his wife, who quietly rose. Going over to the organ bench, she sat down and commenced patting the baby on its back with the palm of her hand.

"Sit down there," said Wivvers to Fay.

"I can't stay long," said Fay, sitting and smoothing down her shiny green skirt with her two hands.

"Why not, can't you?" asked Wivvers in his coarse voice.

"I've got to go home, too, to see my sister," Fay explained in her drawl; "and she told me to get back there again at half-past nine."

"Humph!" grunted the man, puffing at his pipe. He laid the Bible down on the floor beside him. "Well, I hope," he said, "that afore long you'll be stayin' in this house all the time."

His wife, shaking the baby about, and now and then laying her thin cheek against its downy hair, seemed to pay scant attention to the other two.

"I don't know," Fay said calmly, "I ain't decided yet."

"Well, I ain't hurryin' you," said the man; "but it 'pears to me you've had loads of time to decide by now. You won't do no better, I can tell you that. Not in the Valley. I'm the rich-

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est man hereabouts. Sarah'd like it, too." He took his leg from over the arm of his chair to turn half-way towards his wife. "You'd like to have Fay here in the house, wouldn't you, Sarah?"

Sarah looked up from the baby with tired eyes. "Oh, yes," she said.

"Well, I don't see no use killin' yourself hurryin'," remarked Fay. "I'm young yet. But I reckon I will decide before long."

"The sooner, the better," said Wivvers. "I ain't so awful young no more myself; and it seems funny to me I've got this old without being joined to only one woman. It's sayin' a good deal for Sarah."

It was Sarah who broke the pause that followed by asking, but as if she had very little interest in the answer: "How did you come over?"

Her guest answered promptly enough: "I drove," she said. "Mr. Davis loaned me his buggy."

Then there was another pause. It caused no apparent embarrassment to any of the three; but was finally ended by Fay, who, all the time rocking herself with much deliberation, announced dispassionately: "There's soldiers in Antonito."

"Soldiers!" repeated Wivvers, pricking up his ears. "What fer? When did they come?"

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"They come this afternoon on the train," said Fay. "I don't know what they come for."

"Blamed if I do!" he said. "We don't have no strikes down here."

"I don't know," repeated Fay, as if to clear herself from any imputation.

"Where are they stayin'?" asked Sarah, who had stopped shaking about the baby, and now eyed her husband anxiously.

"At Wezel's."

"How many?" Wivvers demanded.

"I don't know," said Fay, with a shade of impatience. "I ain't counted 'em. I didn't see but four or five; but I reckon there's more."

"They ain't here for no good, I'll bet," said Wivvers. "Some trouble on hand for some one."

"I don't know," said Fay again in a bored tone, and getting up. "Well, good-night, Sarah; good-night, Mr. Wivvers; good-night, baby."

"Come and see his tooth," tempted the mother, standing up.

"You might stay a little while," growled Wivvers, also getting up. "Or tell me more about them soldiers. I got a mind to go over with you and see. 'Spose Davis'd let me have the buggy to come back?"

"No," said Fay. "I don't. I know he wouldn't."

"My horse is kinder tired," considered Wivvers.

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"Oh, don't go, Naphtali," his wife pleaded. "Wait till mornin'."

"Well, good-night," said Fay again; and went out.

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XXVI

DANGEROUS ADVICE

WHEN Houghteling, Stange, and the Sergeant went downstairs after having finished their council as to the Mormons, they found Dumain sitting alone in the bar or dining-room, writing. There was a tremendous smell of frying from a room beyond, and Wezel limped bustlingly in and out with piles of plates and handfuls of rattling forks and knives.

Dumain, pushing his papers together as they came in, looked up expectantly and pleasantly.

"We have decided to adopt your plan and write to the Mormons," said Houghteling.

"Good!" cried Dumain, rising. "I was just writing to my superior, but I'll add that satisfactory piece of news," and he bent over to scribble a few more words.

With a half-sneer Houghteling turned away and went into the kitchen. Stange was to write the letter for him.

Dumain, standing by the table where Stange leaned over the paper, biting his yellow mustache, looked curiously at him, and said: "Do you always write with your left——"

"Bless you, no. I can do quite as well with

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my right; result of being rapped over the knuckles when I didn't. But it looks different. See!" He began to copy his letter with his other hand. "It's convenient sometimes."

When Houghteling came hurrying back, Stange pushed aside the papers to give him a place to sign. Dumain craftily slipped the copy among his own papers as he gathered them up off the table.

"They'll think you're dead swell," laughed Stange to his Captain, "having a secretary; and if they can read, they'll probably notice how much better the secretary writes."

The delegation,—consisting of Wezel as guide, the Sergeant, and two men,—rode off on two horses owned by Wezel, and two more hired by him in the village.

It was about an hour after they had gone that Fay Grady, having left her borrowed buggy at its owner's, came walking by the hotel, where Houghteling, Stange, and Dumain were sitting on the bench by the door, all smoking. Most of the soldiers were talking noisily inside the house. The guard was to be seen coming round the corner in the moonlight. The night was very warm.

After the girl had passed, Alfie Stange, standing up and stretching, in the shadow where they were, said, gaping, "I'm going for a little stroll."

"The Lord go with you," said Houghteling.

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"I can't see why any one wants to exercise this hot night."

"I thought I saw my lady-friend," Alfie answered back from the road. "I must tell her about our matrimonial plans for her."

"Don't you be rash, young man," Houghteling called after him.

"I think I shall go over to Emanuelé again," announced Dumain, rising. "I believe he wants me to do some work for him to-morrow. He is so sick, you know, and I will get him to send over his maid then with a message."

Alfie, hearing him coming, walked faster. When he reached the priest's house, he entered the garden and lurked in the shadow of some trees near the door, till Dumain came in and knocked as before. As soon as Stange was aware that the person who came to answer was not Fay, he hurried to the side of the house. There was a fence as high as his head. He pulled himself up and vaulted over. With an instinctive quickness he ran directly to the kitchen window, which was open.

"Fay," he called in a stage whisper.

Fay was sitting languid where Señorita Tecla had left her an instant before, when she broke off a catechism about her visit to go to the front door. She started a little at the sound and turned towards him.

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"Come out," he said, and dodged back as the inside door opened.

Waiting in the dark, he heard Tecla say: "Yes, it was him. But he isn't going to stay to-night. Where are you going?"

"Out to the well," Fay answered in her slow voice.

"Why couldn't you get a drink when you came in? You were nearly late, anyway. You'd better take a pitcher," in Tecla's sharp tones.

"I reckon there's a dipper at the well," drawled Fay.

Then he heard the door open and saw Fay come out in the broad ray of light. Fay was not pretty; but her plumpness and her fresh color looked well in the half-darkness of moonlight. Stange waited until they were a few yards from the house, and then touching her gently on the arm, said in a low tone: "You remember I told you this afternoon not to marry Wivvers; well, now I want you to."

"Why?" asked Fay softly.

"Why? I don't know. I think he's a good sort of chap. Never mind why. Say you will because I want you to. Won't you?"

They had come to the artesian well, whose white water seemed to foam up out of the black ground; they could hear it gurgling away through a trough. Fay stooped and got the dipper from somewhere; as she rose she said,

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"I ain't sure. I ain't decided yet whether I want to be second wife."

Then she drank.

Stange jerked one fist in quick impatience.

But gently enough he said, "We want you to. I want you to. Won't you?"

Fay was offering him the refilled dipper.

"We are going——" he began, making a gesture to push it away.

The water spilled out with a swish over Fay's skirt, and before he had time to finish his sentence, he heard Tecla's voice calling through the darkness, "Fay Grady! Fay Grady!"

"All right!" called Fay by his side.

He could see a figure, black in the open doorway; but he knew she couldn't see them.

"Come to the hotel at seven in the morning, will you?"

Fay nodded.

As she started back to the house, with a sudden impulse he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"Don't," she said, without struggling.

"Always two," he breathed, kissing her again; "to make sure of more."

Then he let her go.

"Come out again tonight, will you?" he asked.

"Why?"

"I don't know. But come. Won't you, Fay?"

"I don't believe I will," she said deliberately.

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"Can't you get out without her knowing it?"

"I guess I could; through the church."

"Well, won't you?"

Just then Tecla called again, "Fay Grady, are you coming?"

"I don't see no reason to come out," said Fay to Stange, and began to run ponderously to the house.

Stange walked slowly in the same direction, till he saw the door close and shut in the light. Then he stopped still. He snapped his fingers angrily. "Damn it!" he said fiercely.

When Fay got inside the dimly lighted kitchen, she explained, stopping quite short, "I got my dress wet out there."

"I thought you were lost, you were so slow. You must be careful." Tecla had a worried look in her sharp eyes. "Did you know there were soldiers in town?"

Fay giggled a very little.

"Did you know it?" demanded Tecla sharply.

"I guess they won't hurt me," said Fay with a grave face.

"Hurt you!" Tecla repeated. "Indeed you shan't give them a chance. I don't want you to leave the place again while they're here, without my permission. Do you understand?"

The girl nodded.

A slow, tremulous voice was heard calling Fay.

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"Run to the Father," directed the Señorita.

Fay slowly proceeded into the Father's large study. He was alone, but was just reseating himself.

"You are to go to the hotel to-morrow at seven," he said, coughing.

"Yes," said Fay promptly. "I know."

"To see if there is any message for me from Mr. Dumain."

"Is that his name?" asked Fay.

"Yes, the gentleman you let in this afternoon." He began to cough again.

Stange, after Fay had left him, soon reached the road again, where he encountered Dumain, also returning to the hotel.

"I've just been consulting Miss Grady," began Stange indefinitely but gaily. "I can't see that it hurts, although Dan is so opposed to it."

"What does she say?" asked Dumain guardedly.

"Oh, I told her to come to the hotel in the morning," said Alfie. "From what I've heard of Wivvers, I rather misdoubt he may be hard to deal with; and I should think it would make it easier if he finds his sweetheart on our side."

"I should think it might," returned Dumain, dry and non-committal.

When the embassy to Manassa returned there

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was no one to be seen at the hotel, except the guard on post and the Corporal of the guard, who looked out of the door, holding a lantern, as they were challenged. While they were being recognized, Houghteling, putting his head out of a second-story window, asked in a lowered voice, "Is he coming?"

"Yes, it's all right," answered the Sergeant. "He was almost on the point of coming on his own hook."

"Naturally," began Wezel.

"Go to bed, all of you," interrupted the voice from above, and the head went inside.

That night before going to bed, Dumain had written a report to his superiors, from which the following is an extract:

"The parish priest here, though I have almost persuaded him the soldiers have no intention against San Rafael, is yet, in his hypochondria, so cautious that I fear he may at any time send the Penitentes a warning to give up the ceremony. To prevent this and to insure carrying out our plan of giving them a severe and memorable punishment, I shall resort to extreme measures if I must. Fortunately, he is too sick to go to them himself. I am also having some difficulty in arranging, against their wills, the plans of the soldiers. Their Captain is a very suspicious, stubborn young man; but I think I have man-

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aged to keep him interested and occupied here for a day or two, so that he will not arrive at S. R. before time. I am sorry to say that he mistrusts me; but the ruses I am thereby forced to, serve to keep my mind employed and away from the wretched creatures we are forced for their good to chastise. I thank God that, though I use the soldiers to scourge them with, I myself need take no active physical part in the punishment. It is enough to furnish brains for all the short-sighted people blindly made to carry out my purposes, which they cannot see now are their own as well."

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XXVII

A THREAT AND A PLEA

SEVERAL weeks had passed since Paez had gone forth under his cross. Sometimes he was seen near the settlement,—a motionless or at least very slowly moving dark object. The priest went out quietly every morning to feed him; but as yet no one else had spoken to him or even inquired about him.

Life in San Rafael dragged as evenly as ever. Everyone fasted; and it rained every afternoon. It was suffocatingly, unendurably hot. Even the Penitentes, who are used to heat, stayed generally in the shade at midday.

Dolores was still with Panchita. Sometimes she would sew in the low dark room, where it was stuffy, but not comparatively hot; oftener she would sit in the hotter but airier porch, where Pasco stirred his tubs. He didn't stir very vigorously, for he had spells of merely holding the stick upright in the middle of his dye-stuff to gaze abstractedly out over the steaming Valley before him at the blue mirage and the hills. When Dolores was there he stared mostly at her; but as she very seldom spoke to him, he spoke as little to her. Sometimes she would look up to smile at him over her stint. Often after thus

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smiling, she would sigh discontentedly; or would purse her lips and shake her hair back from her face, and move nervously the bare foot she was not sitting on.

One evening they were sitting thus in the porch, Dolores with her hands placidly folded over her sewing, and her head against the wall, Pasco nodding above his dye-tub, gradually letting the stick slip from his hands. The quivering heat which veils the San Luis Valley all day, faded out as the twilight slowly gathered; and the far-away mountains moved nearer as they became more clear-cut in their outlines and more purple on their slopes. The huge sturdy mass of Blanca, dominating the others, grew soft and smoky, as the blue lake of mirage which bathes his foot all the hot day, vapored away into darkness. One star overhead pricked through the sombering sky, and gradually shone forth into brave yellowness.

As Dolores looked, a pale thin halo of grayish light began to suffuse the sky over one end of the long crest of Blanca. Rather fast this warmed and deepened and grew in intensity, till it became such a radiant soft brightness that any one might know there was something there behind, and all the dusky silent Valley waited in suspense for what was going to happen. Suddenly a thin sliver of gold appeared; and then came the ever fresh miracle of the moon push-

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ing herself up over the rim of the world into the heavens; till at last she slipped up clear of the hills and hung there, pausing a moment,—a round, full, red, sultry, swollen moon, with her foolish face indistinct and ghastly.

After this the light quickly changed. Twilight with its shades became moonlight with its shadows. Dolores got up; and as she moved, Pasco waked with a start. Though he absorbedly watched her leave the porch, he made no motion.

Out there in the open it was as close and almost as warm as by day. The stored-up heat rose from the warm ground, no longer steaming to the eye, but quite perceptible to the feeling. But by midnight it would be chilly.

A dark figure moving through the oblique moonlight, proved to be, as Dolores scrutinized it, Fanita, going apparently from her own house to that of Oestocris. She was coming directly towards Dolores. Though she had always avoided this girl painfully, Dolores now halted, and with one hand on her hip, waited in silence for her. The other approached evenly; till all at once, seeing who it was that stood in wait for her, she hesitated. Then she started on again and came along in the thin wavering light. She changed her course the least point, however; and Dolores, making a step or two forward, anticipated her.

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"Wait a minute, girl," Dolores said; "I want to speak to you. I never have before this, and I think I won't again; but I do now."

Fanita drew away to one side, and hurried on. But Dolores put forth one hand to seize her bare arm, and held her.

"Wait, won't you, when I speak to you? You are not very obliging,—Coward! I am not going to say much; just to tell you what I think of you."

"Let me go," commanded Fanita, in a hoarse tone, trying to pull away.

Dolores holding her tight, pulled narder, jerking the other girl toward her. "You'll wait, while I tell you to," she said coldly.

Fanita was trembling.

"I suppose you can't help being a Penitente," Dolores began again, keeping her voice low; "God made you one. But some of the Penitentes are decent people,—Panchita is, and Pasco, and Paez. But you have no heart,—you and that old woman,—you are like coyotes, you two, sneaking around in the dark to kill people. Only you are worse,—you pretend you think God likes it. She wants her own son to be crucified, and you are worse than she is. It's just because you are jealous of me."

Fanita, who was regaining her composure, made an inarticulate sound of disdain.

"You know it is," pursued Dolores hotly, "you

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tried to make my old lover take me away, so that I could not have Paez. You'd rather have him die than me to have him; because he never would love you,—he'd rather die himself than have you."

"It's a lie," said Fanita between her teeth.

"It's not a lie;" Dolores raised her voice.

"He wanted to be the Christ, for the love of God. All the men want to."

"He did not want to," Dolores cried bitterly. "Do you think God dealt out those cards? No, I tell you, He didn't. It's gambling,—it's low-down dirty gambling."

"I prayed to the Saints,—the Saints did it," insisted Fanita.

Dolores laughed in wrath. "The Saints listen to you!"

"They did listen to me. I told him beforehand —you see! They did choose him,—I asked them to."

"Then it's your fault," cried Dolores trembling, "you heartless Indian! You—you devil! I pray God to punish you—I pray God—" she let go of Fanita's arms and clasped her hands as in prayer.

There was silence for an instant. Then Fanita burst out mockingly: "You are the one who's jealous,—jealous of God. He belongs to Him now. You'll never get him."

Dolores turned on her in a fury. "I will get him! I'll get him from you and that old panther,

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—or;" Fanita, shrinking again, drew away; "or you'll be sorry for it," concluded Dolores almost calmly.

A shrill voice rang out from one of the dark houses on the edge of the moonlight, "Fanita!"

The girl with alacrity turned and ran from Dolores.

Left alone, Dolores stood still, panting and quivering. She made one or two moves in this direction and that, till finally, becoming calmer, she walked straight over to the road and studied it, up and down. As usual there was no living thing on its dusty stretches. Crossing to the other side, she searched the waste of fields as well as she could under the deceptive distances of the moonshine. Then she slowly went down the road as far as the river; there she crossed the little grass-plot and peered about through the trees. At times she paused to hearken; but there was no other sound than the welling of the river and what rustling of the leaves she herself occasioned in pushing through.

When she left the copse she skirted up behind the houses of the hamlet,—stopping to explore the shadowy spaces between. But the only person she saw was a little girl, who toiled past unconsciously near her with a heavy water-bucket. After thus prowling along until she reached the end of the settlement, she struck off into the uplying country towards New Mex-

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ico, which is only a mile or two away. Here grow much low sage-bush and cactus; and in order not to run thorns into her bare feet, she was fain to pick her way nicely among the crowd of black shadows that spotted the ground.

As she went thus cautiously up under the vague moonlight, she seemed to be aware, somewhere on the deceptive face of the rolling prairie, of some dark thing moving. She doubled her pace. It was yet a long monotonous way before she was sure. But then, abruptly, the thing resolved itself and stood out bold in the weird light as the dragging form of Paez with his cross.

Dolores walked slowly to him. Bent down under his burden, though he crouched facing her, yet he gave no sign of seeing her, till she not only stood before him, but said, with a tremor in her voice: "Paez, I have came out here to see you."

She marked in the gray moonlight how hollow and black his eyes were.

"Lola!" he said in a hoarse voice, so rough and weak that he made another attempt and again said, "Lola!"

"Sit down," said the girl tenderly; "here!" and she stepped to a spot free from brush. "I want to talk to you."

Paez crawled after her. He sank down into a strange, cramped posture, his body half under the great cross, which rested by one arm on the

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ground, and with one of his own arms twisted back over it.

Dolores looked at him compassionately.

"Is that the best way you can sit?" she asked.

For answer he wriggled about, and in trying to get more comfortable and to keep the heavy cross from crushing him down, he caused it to keel over backwards, jerking him roughly with it, so that he lay flat upon it, his face up to the sky.

Dolores gave a little cry as he rolled over.

"Oh! are you hurt?" she kneeled and leaned over him.

"No," he answered in a weak dry voice; "it's best this way. I generally lie this way. Only," he added, moving his head, "it's hard and it hurts me."

The girl gently lifted his head, and gathering as much of his long matted hair as she could, pushed it under so as to form a cushion.

"There, is that better?" she asked, smoothing his hair back from his eyes and letting her moist palm lie a moment on his hot dry forehead.

Paez gave a sigh of comfort.

"Yes," he said huskily; and after clearing his throat; "talk to me now."

"I'm going away, dear," said Dolores all at once, with a break in her voice.

"No, no, Lola," he answered calmly but firmly. "Don't go."

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"Come with me," she besought, taking up his hand, which lay near hers on the sand. "Come with me, Paez. Why do I want to stay here now, with you like this? Come! You have fever," she said, squeezing his hot hand, and then beginning to stroke it. "I don't want them to kill you. Don't let them."

For a while he said nothing.

Then after a husky effort, and once more clearing his throat, he answered: "No, I can't go now."

"Yes," implored the girl.

He turned his head till it lay on the side, looking at her.

"I love you," she cried passionately.

Again a pause; and again he murmured: "No, no, Lola. I can't go now."

"They'll kill you," repeated Dolores.

"Then I shall get rid of all this pain;" his voice was smoother.

"So you will if you come with me," said Dolores, despairingly.

He only shook his head from side to side on the cross.

"No, it's too late," he said.

Dolores sighed; nearly a groan.

For some time she sat gazing at him, her bosom rising with her heavy breathing.

At last she said: "You were afraid before."

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"I know," answered Paez; "but that was before."

"Before what?" she asked curiously.

In the moonlight she could see a smile spread over his face. Then, as he spoke, she noticed how white his teeth looked. "Before I saw Him," he answered contentedly.

"Saw who?" asked Dolores, glancing over her shoulder.

"The Infant Jesus," he responded tenderly. "He has been coming to me out here at night, when everything is still, carrying His own little cross. Only He is all in white and blue. And He says things to me."

"What does He say?" Dolores asked, sighing deeply.

"All sorts of things," Paez went on glibly; and she could see that his sunken eyes looked through and beyond her. "Sometimes He talks Latin like Father Chucho, and then I don't understand Him. But He has a nice soft voice like— like—," he was considering; "like Fanita," he decided.

His fixed eyes did not see the sudden fierce look that Dolores gave him.

"Once He came while it rained," continued Paez; "but generally it's at night, when there's a moon. He says, 'Paez, I will take care of you now, and so will My Virgin Mother and San Rafael and Our Lady of Santa Fe and Our Lady

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of Sorrows and San Francisco; and We will all come to you on the cross; and I will take you Myself—' "

Dolores jumped up; but the monotonous voice went on unheeding. She looked at him fixedly a moment. Then, "Paez! Paez!" she said sharply; but he ran on and on. By degrees his voice grew more and more faint, till finally he was only mumbling to himself.

Dolores frowning, pushed his hand impatiently with her bare foot. Pulling it away, he broke off and began much louder, praying, "O Little Infant Jesus, help me—"

Dolores made the sign of the cross fervently and didn't kick him again. He lay quiet; but she could see by their shining that his eyes were open. She dropped to her knees again. Putting her hand on the coarse cloth that covered his breast, she shook him gently.

"Paez, I am going away."

Finally he answered, "No, don't go."

"Yes," she fiercely insisted; "I am going back to find Cristobal. He loves me."

Again the pause.

Then the reply, mechanically, "I love you."

She bent her head down till she could feel his faint breath.

"Then you will come with me," she said.

"No, no, Lola, not now,—"

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Dolores jumped up. She looked down on him an instant, wrathfully. Then she turned her back on him and flung away in her proud walk, back towards San Rafael, towards the low-hanging golden moon.

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XXVIII

THE BRAYING OF AN ASS

HOT as the night still was, before she had gone far, Dolores was running. Even as she ran, she kept discreetly in what little shadow the houses afforded; and coming round the backs of them, she slackened her pace as she reached Panchita's, where, having noiselessly skirted the adobe walls, she came into the porch. Listening intently, she heard the sound that told her the housewife was abed and asleep. But it so happened that Pasco, having dozed again over his buckets, was still sitting heaped up behind them. A sudden snort disclosed him to Dolores.

With a forefinger on her lower lip, she stood and waited. She turned one ear to him; but he was now quiet.

After a long moment's deliberation she slipped past him, and through the large dark room, and feeling her way by the walls, into her own little room. She very soon had rummaged among her things, and in the moonlight was examining her little white pistol. Holding it close to her eyes, she saw that it was loaded and in working order; then, frowning over her task, she carefully took the small cartridges out one by one, and putting

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them on the floor in the patch of brightness,—all but one which she held in her teeth,—she stretched forth her bent arm and hand and drew the trigger. Several times she repeated this; and at the click that rang sharp and clear in the silence, she shook her head.

Then she replaced the cartridges in the pistol, and put it into her bosom. Again she hesitated, frowning and moistening her lips. The result of her hesitation was that she soon drew out the little shining weapon from her bosom; and having stuffed it back into her collapsed bundle of clothes, she stole safely from the room, through the shadowy, tremulous living-room, and out into the porch.

Pasco, with folded arms was leaning against one of the rough posts. Dolores coming softly to him, laid a hand on his arms and said in a very low tone: "Will you do something for me?"

Pasco looked down at her and nodded.

She looked into his eyes.

"Get me a knife," she breathed into his face.

Dolores moved aside as he started; but she seized his wrist and held him a moment, pulling him towards her.

"I will wait here," she said sweetly. "A pointed knife. One of the big ones. Be very quiet."

He vanished into the doorway; and she stood, one hand against the post, squeezing her lips together and breathing deeply. As soon as he

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reappeared she sprang towards him and got the knife into her hand. She held it down at arm's length at her side.

Then she paused. Putting the palm of her left hand against Pasco's breast, "Do you know where the Father keeps his donkey?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Will you come with me?" said Dolores, moving nearer to him. "Over there," and she pointed far across the Valley to the east.

He only looked.

She threw her left arm up around his neck and pushed his head towards her. Leaning her own head back so that their faces were near together, she said, coaxingly—

"Do you want to come, Pasco?"

"Yes," said Pasco, his arm round her.

She half closed her eyes and looked into his till she saw them grow tender and come nearer. Then she suddenly turned her head and so moved it from side to side that his lips touched her brow and brushed across.

Then she jumped away.

"Come on," she said.

"It is horse-stealing," remarked Pasco gravely, as they got under the stars. "You know what they do down there."

In the San Luis Valley they shoot men for horse-stealing.

Dolores stopped to give him a long look of

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contempt before saying coolly: "It's only a donkey. And I'll send it back. Besides I have a gun."

She opened her eyes very wide to give him a good stare. Then she smiled; and starting off on a round pace, turned up the hill, Pasco at her heels. As both were barefooted, they made no noise.

The night was beginning to be cool.

They passed on one hand the big house of old Oestocris, on the other the square black church. When they arrived before two little houses, where the priest and Fanita severally lived, Dolores halted.

As Pasco silently came up with her, she directed him: "You go get the donkey."

"And you—?" he asked doubtfully.

"Shut up," she commanded fiercely. "Wait here with it."

He disappeared behind the priest's house where the donkey was used to be picketed. Dolores waited stealthily; and as she listened at the door, she examined her knife, wetting her thumb and running it down the edge. The point, though a trifle bent, was sharp.

All at once from behind the priest's house, the donkey began to bray. Instinctively Dolores moved away from the door, and letting fall her arm, stood motionless, trembling. The sound seemed fearfully loud; but it was over at once.

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Nobody appeared to have heard it. She crouched in the shadow of Fanita's house; but hearing no movement within, came out again just as a man stepped from the other house.

"Lola!" he said at once,—the Father's voice.

Dolores dropped the knife.

"Lola!" he repeated, not loud but clearly. "What are you doing?" he demanded as he reached her. "Ah!"

He had caught sight of the moonlight glistening on the blade of the knife, which had stuck straight up in the ground.

"I was going to kill Fanita," said the girl defiantly.

"Sh, sh! No, no!" he said soothingly; "who is with you?"

"Nobody."

"Who went to my donkey? Ah, here he is," he added, as Pasco unwittingly started forth and then drew back behind the house.

"Come out, Pasco," he called in a low tone, "we'll need the donkey. Bring it. Give me the knife," he commanded the girl in a still lower tone.

Dolores picked it up, and holding it by the blade, gave him the handle.

"Lola, Lola!" repeated the priest sadly.

Pasco reaching them, stood silent, holding the donkey. The priest took the bridle from him

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with one hand and held out the knife with the other. Pasco looked, then took it.

"Take it back," bade the priest coldly; and he shook his head and sighed, "Pasco, I am disappointed. No more Saint John now. You will have to be Judas."

Pasco hung his head.

"Is there anything you want to take?" the priest asked, turning to the girl who stood staring at him boldly.

"My clothes of course," snapped Dolores; "and who has my money?"

"I gave you the receipt," said the patient priest; "you can get it in Antonito."

"And I want my white mantilla in the church," said Dolores.

"I will get you that," replied the priest; "although you dedicated it to San Rafael."

Dolores muttered some angry remark about San Rafael.

Father Maria de Jesus, with his stateliest step, leading his donkey, started over to the church. Dolores followed close behind, and Pasco some way behind her.

At the door the Father, turning to Dolores who was about to enter too, holding out a restraining hand, said: "Do not come into this holy place. Not till you have been absolved."

As he disappeared inside she broke out furiously, as loud as she dared: "Holy place! My

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God! You cursed Indians that nail boys on crosses! Half-breeds! Confound you! I spit on you," and a good deal more in confused rage, which caused Pasco to open astonished eyes and to make the sign of the cross.

When the priest reappeared with the white lace mantilla, Dolores with an angry grunt, snatched it from him; and as she walked down the slope towards Panchita's, she tried nervously to fold it.

Father Maria de Jesus, tightening the rope about his waist as he waited, and Pasco with the knife, stood outside Dolores's window while she climbed in. They could hear her inside, throwing and pulling things about, choking, sobbing, and scolding. As their serious eyes met, the priest shook his head and Pasco again looked down.

Dolores tugged her bundle up on the window-sill.

"Here, take this," she said with tears of anger in her voice.

Father Maria de Jesus helped her out; and getting on his donkey directed her to put her bundle up and to mount behind him. Dolores shivered in the chill night air.

Pasco stood watching them.

"Good-bye, Pasco;" Dolores defiantly held out her hand.

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Pasco came running alongside and took it; she gave his hand a squeeze.

"Good-bye," she repeated bitterly, "you're the one decent person in this dirty town."

Watching them ride off, he stood alone, till they were swallowed into the night.

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XXIX

FAY'S GUEST

DOLORES and the priest rode down into the dark Valley. Sometimes they went in a slow dog-trot, but generally in a walk. The moon, near her setting, shed down a weakening purplish light on their backs; there was no sound of any living creature but themselves. As they crossed the ford the warm water splashed up on their cold feet.

Then on they rode through the monotonous low-land; on either side the fences could just be seen, black and endless, running along forever. Beyond them was the dark spread of the desert, without a tree, without a house. Overhead the sky twinkled with stars; as the moon grew faint, the Milky Way became distinct.

At first, although he told her to, Dolores would not touch the priest to hold herself on; but before long, since she found that she and her awkward bundle rolled about dangerously, she suddenly put one arm around his waist. Frowning and biting her lip, she maintained a dogged silence. The night faded out and the unhealthy gray false dawn began to spread vaguely over the flat Valley. It was chilly, and there was a deathlike silence and freshness.

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The priest, taking his rosary out of his girdle, began half-audibly to repeat prayers in Latin.

Dolores tried to make out the ghostly suggestion of great mountains far away over the plain.

When he had finished the prayers Father Maria de Jesus, half-turning to his companion, said kindly: "Wouldn't you like me to confess you now, Lola?"

"No," snapped Dolores.

"But I don't like to let you go from me with the stain of sin on your soul," he protested.

The girl tossed her head.

"I guess there are priests over there," she retorted, "just as good."

The Father after a moment of silence, said earnestly: "Yes, I know there are. But be sure you go to them, Lola."

Dolores sputtered in disdain.

"I'll go when I'm sorry," she declared.

The Father sighed.

They came to a branching in the yellowish road, and as they chose one turn, Dolores, in a tone of suspicion, said quickly: "That's the road."

"The road to where?" asked the patient priest.

"To Las Animas, of course; that's where I want to go," she answered petulantly.

"I thought I'd take you to Antonito, Lola," he began cautiously, "to Father Emanuelé—"

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"For my money? All right."

"Yes, your money is there," he agreed; "but I thought of leaving you there awhile. I know he would take you in, and you would have a good home. His sister is a holy woman—"

"I am tired of holy women," she sullenly interrupted.

"But you have no one to go to, Lola."

"I have Cristobal. He is better to me than you are; and I'll go to him," she snapped.

He made no reply.

"Do you hear?" she asked sharply. "I'll go over to Las Animas to Cristobal. He is waiting for me there. I won't stay with your old priest, I tell you, even if you do leave me."

"I can't force you to do this and that, Lola," he said sadly. "I know that, but I don't like to let you go off this way, alone. You might not find Cristobal; and even if you did, I am not sure I want him to marry you yet—"

"I don't care what you want any more," said the girl.

"Lola, Lola," he protested, "be more charitable. I can't bear to see you going away like this. But, as I told you, I cannot force you to do anything, and I will not try. Only," he added with a sigh, "I have done all I could for you; and I don't think you ought to hate me; and if you will run into harm because you do, I don't know how I am to forgive myself."

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They rode along for a while in silence. The dawn light was thickening and the black bulk of Blanca began to show strangely in the still, weird, early morning. The houses of Antonito began to gather into sight up the tan-colored desert. They came to a wayside artesian well, and Dolores said she wanted a drink. The priest, dismounting, had filled his hat with water, which he turned to offer her; but she was already down and was drinking at the foaming spout. So he presented his dripping hat to the grateful donkey.

When they were mounted and away again, he tried once more, gently: "You are a very sinful girl, Lola; and I think if you would stay only a few days in this peaceful household—"

"I won't go there at all," interrupted Dolores firmly, "if you don't promise not to try to make me stay."

With a sigh, "Well, I promise," he replied resignedly.

By very early morning they plodded into the extreme end of the sleeping village of Antonito, and drew up before the priest's house. There was not a living soul stirring that they saw; for the hotel, where a sentry was pacing up and down his post, was hidden by a slight curve in the street. But as they dismounted, they saw a flash of green inside the open front door; and directly afterwards a plump, youthful figure in a

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green gown, coming out on the steps with a broom in her hands, caught sight of them, and stood leaning on her broom, quietly eyeing them. She said nothing as they went up the walk, Dolores with her haughtiest strut.

"Good morning, my daughter," began Father Maria de Jesus in English, as the two halted at the foot of the steps; "is it too early for us to see the good Father?"

"If you mean Father Emanuelé," said Fay Grady with a yawn, "it is too early. There ain't nobody in the house awake yet, but me."

The priest looked dubiously at Dolores. "If you will wait a little while, Lola, I will leave a note telling the Father to deliver your money to you."

Dolores yawned in her turn, and said nonchalantly, "I don't care. I'm pretty tired. I can rest awhile."

"And I dare say this young woman will give you some breakfast," he said encouragingly.

Fay Grady, leaning on her broom, said nothing.

"Could you?" he asked her directly.

"I don't know whether I could or not till I ask Miss Tecla," replied Fay; "she might be awful mad."

The priest smiled. "I am sure I can answer for that," he said; "she is a good woman. Do you think she will be down soon?"

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Fay took her mild, steady eyes off Dolores and answered: "Not before half an hour, I guess. You can wait if you want."

She turned her eyes back on Dolores, who tossed her head and made a mocking face at her.

"No, I haven't time," said Maria de Jesus; "I must be home for mass. But Dolores will wait; and if you can get me a pencil and paper without disturbing any one, I will leave a little note for the Father. Could you?"

"I s'pose I could in the Father's study," said Fay, and turned ponderously to disappear inside the house.

"I am sorry, Lola," said the priest, "that I must leave you."

Dolores tossed her head, as much as to say she cared little.

"I'll get your bundle," he said kindly.

When he came back to the steps with it, Dolores still stood defiant, shoulders back and hands on hips. Presently Fay reappeared with a sheet of paper and a pencil. These she gave the priest, saying: "I couldn't find only ink at first."

Father Maria de Jesus, seating himself on the lowest step wrote on a higher one. He wrote with some pains and very laboriously. During his task Dolores more than once fastened her contemptuous black eyes on Fay; but the stolid gray ones returned her withering stare most complacently. The endurance of optic nerves

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might have been crucially tried, had not the end of the inditing ended this silent battle.

"There," said the priest, creasing his letter shut, "give that to Father Emanuelé, my daughter. Is there any news in town to-day?"

Fay hesitated; and at last answered truly: "Not as I know of."

The priest turned to go. "Remember what I have told you, Lola."

At the gate he turned back again and called out: "God bless you, Lola!" raising his hand in benediction. Dolores leaning forward, spat on the ground towards him.

Father Chucho, sighing deeply, pulled his donkey's head round towards the long hot homeward ride.

His parting salutation to the intractable Dolores probably wakened the Señorita Tecla, because he had not been gone two minutes when that severe lady, arrayed in a gray calico wrapper, appeared at the open front door. The sun, now fully risen, threw his early hot rays into the garden and upon the yellow front of the house. The two girls were still upon the steps.

"Who is this?" began the Señorita sharply, indicating Dolores to Fay Grady.

"I don't know," yawned her hand-maiden disinterestedly.

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"Where did she come from?" Tecla demanded with a shade more of impatience.

"The little Penitente priest brought her on his donkey."

"Where is he now?" said Tecla.

"He's gone away again," Fay replied.

"Did you tell him the soldiers were here?" asked the mistress, anxiously.

Fay shook her head. At the word soldiers Dolores smiled with furtive pleasure.

"Run after him, Fay Grady; run and bring him back. Tell him about it;" bade Tecla, nervous with excitement.

Fay didn't move.

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I do," said Fay, unmoved; "but he said he was in a hurry; and I couldn't catch him if I did run. I can't run as fast as a donkey."

"You talk as slow as one," Tecla snapped, glaring at her with a look of helpless agitation. She fairly trembled in her anxiety. But a gleam of memory seemed somewhat to lessen her worry.

"I believe the Father is going to send a message up to San Rafael to-day. But you ought to have told him. Suppose the soldiers are sent to stop them."

"I don't care if they are," remarked Fay.

"I am ashamed—" began Tecla; and stopped with a gasp, fixing her fierce eyes on the girl as

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if to cow her. Then she turned toward Dolores, over whose face a gleam of satisfaction had spread during this conversation.

She spoke to her in Spanish. "Are you a Penitente?"

"No, I'm not," answered the girl angrily in English; "and I hope the soldiers will go up there and catch them. Murderers! I hate them."

Tecla's face was aghast.

"Here's a letter he left for the Father," put in Fay with great equanimity, pointing to it in Dolores's hand.

"Why didn't you tell me before," exclaimed Tecla, fairly snatching the proffered paper. After hastily reading the superscription, she hurried indoors again.

Dolores looked after her with a mocking smile.

"Are you a Mormon?" Fay asked.

"I am not," said Dolores with decision.

"I thought you wasn't," considered Fay; "'cause you are so peppery."

Dolores, bending no very gracious look on her, said haughtily: "Get me some paper, too. I want to write a letter."

Fay looked at her sideways, and made no motion to go.

"Go on," bade the other, "hurry up!"

"I ain't your servant," replied Fay, coolly;

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"and if you want me to do anything for you, you got to say 'please.' "

Dolores bit her lip, flushing.

"I must have it," she said earnestly; "get it. Please, then."

"Do you want Miss Tecla to know it?" asked Fay.

"No, no. I'm going to write to my lover," she said, in a sudden burst of confidence; "and tell him to come and get me. He's afraid of soldiers; and I want to see if he loves me enough."

"Well, I can't get it now without her seeing me," said Fay; "she's in there."

At this moment a door inside was heard to open and to close.

"I'll get it for you after a while," said Fay, lowering her voice; and then the Señorita reappeared.

Meanwhile Tecla had gone into the ground-floor room where her brother slept, and finding him now sleeping, had put her hand on his shoulder and shaken him back and forth till he awoke, blinking.

"Here's a letter from Father Maria de Jesus," she said, as soon as he opened his eyes.

"Hm?" he mumbled.

"Shall I read it to you?" She opened it, and hearing his sleepy murmur of assent read in Spanish: "Beloved brother, you may deliver to this maiden, Dolores, the money I entrusted you

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to keep for her. She is a headstrong, violent girl; her soul is dark with sinful designs. I wish you may persuade her to remain some time in your peaceful household, for her soul's sake. Your brother in God, who kisses your hand, Maria de Jesus."

"A-a-a," muttered Emanuelé sleepily. Then rousing himself a little, said thickly: "The money is in my desk in a bag. You can get it."

"You are not going to let her go," exclaimed Tecla.

"Hm?" he queried, turning over painfully and panting.

"See what the Father says. We must keep her."

"Do as you think," said Emanuelé, between half-groans. "The Father is always right."

Tecla stood resting her eyes on him, musing. Her purpose was growing firm in her mind. She wished her brother could wake up thoroughly more quickly; but at the same time she realized that it was now as well perhaps that he didn't. A gleam of pity for the sick brother crossed her ungentle eyes; and without more words she turned and went noiselessly from the half-darkened chamber.

When she appeared again in the sunlight on the steps, she was honeying her pointed tongue for her charitable ends.

Dolores herself furnished the opportunity.

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"He said you'd give me something to eat," she proposed, pleased to be gracious too.

"Of course I will, my dear," answered Tecla with such unwonted unction that Fay Grady turned on her her great gray eyes, wider even than usual. "Come right in and bring your bundle. I'll take you upstairs; and Fay can be getting breakfast ready for us."

Dolores, with a swing of her skirts, swam up the steps, brushing against Fay; but while accepting the invitation she ignored the hint about her bundle, which Tecla, with a sour glance at Fay, was fain to pick up herself, and follow her new guest in and up the stairs.

Fay, with her usual deliberation, took her broom from the corner of the door, and proceeded to the kitchen. There some five minutes later, while she was bending over a spluttering gridiron on the open stove, she heard the door open; and turning her heated red face, saw Dolores with head thrown back swing down the three steps into the room. She came close to Fay, and in a low tone said: "The paper. Don't forget. She's dressing now."

"All right. I'll go and get it then," said Fay; "here, you hold this, and don't let it burn."

After one look of astonishment Dolores took the handle of the gridiron; and Fay went slowly from the room.

Directly she returned, and as she opened the

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door, a smell of burning meat met her. Dolores was standing by the open window on tiptoes, peering out. She turned back into the room.

"Can you see the soldiers from here?" she said: "are they at the hotel?"

Fay who had lifted the gridiron with one hand, and was holding out the paper and pencil with the other, answered: "No; the fence is too high. I told you not to let this burn."

Dolores gave her a serious look, and said nothing. She was twisting the point of the pencil in her mouth.

"Well, you'll have to eat it," remarked Fay; "it ain't much burned, anyhow, I guess."

Seated before her sheet of paper, the newcomer was bending her brows in cogitation.

"Can you write very good?" asked Fay, with a slight tinge of wonder in her tone.

Dolores nodded. "Good enough," she said, raising her head after tracing a couple of words with even more labor than Maria de Jesus had expended.

"Do you know any of the soldiers?" she asked Fay.

Fay nodded.

"Yes, I know one of 'em what's a Captain."

"Do you like him?"

Fay considered before replying: "Oh, good enough. I ain't worryin' much about them, 'cause I got a chance to get married."

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"Is he in love with you?"

"Naphtali? Why, I suppose he is." Fay was filling the coffee pot, and didn't stop to ponder.

"The Captain, I mean."

"Oh, him? I don't know," said Fay carelessly. "He might be. I ain't known him but only yesterday; but he kissed me last night."

After a contemptuous stare at Fay, who was all unconscious of it, Dolores shrugged her shoulders, and then leaned again to her letter. After much labored breathing, and many grimaces, and frequent brushing the hair from her eyes, she at last ended it.

"Dear Cristobal," it read, but in Spanish; "Come over to Father Emanuelé's and get me. There are soldiers here. If you are not afraid, and love me still, come. If you don't, I'll marry them, because they are in love with me, and you'll never see me any more. Lovingly, Lola."

She addressed it to Janoso in Las Animas County.

"Will you take it and mail it?" she asked Fay.

Fay looked at her fixedly for a moment or two, until Dolores stamped her foot with impatience. "Perhaps I might after while," answered Fay.

"It must go right now. I'll take it myself, then."

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As she heard the kitchen door open, she shoved the letter into her bosom.

"Where are you going?" demanded Tecla sharply.

Dolores opened her mouth and then shut it; but her eyes flashed as she answered with preternatural mildness, her hand still on the door-knob: "Just for a little walk."

"It's breakfast time," said Tecla decisively; "besides the town is full of soldiers and I don't want you walking out there. You're up to some mischief, I'll be bound. And you, too, Fay Grady; don't you go out except when you are sent, while these soldiers are here. Come," she said sweetly to Dolores; "we'll have breakfast now."

The girl hesitated. She bit her lip, and threw a wicked side-glance at her hostess before she answered mildly: "All right." As she took her seat, she asked: "When does the down train pass?"

"At nine," said Tecla. "Why? You aren't going away."

Dolores's feelings burst forth in one flash. "I am when I get ready," she cried in a rage. Then she subsided, with one burning spot on each dark cheek.

Tecla eyed her ominously; but a diversion was at hand.

"Fay Grady, this meat is burnt!" she said

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wrathfully, as the dish was offered to her by her waitress-cook.

"I know it," said Fay placidly. "It ain't my fault."

"Don't make excuses, you careless creature!" replied Tecla.

For some while there was silence in the kitchen.

When Tecla and her guest had finished their meal, Fay Grady sat down at the end of the table for her own. Her mistress consulted her watch; put it back into her scant bosom with compressed lips; in a few minutes consulted it again.

"Fay Grady, it is seven o'clock almost. Weren't you to go over to the hotel then?"

Fay arose with unusual alacrity. But after taking her sunbonnet down from a peg and putting it on, she hesitated, while she stood at the door waiting. Tecla prodded her again:

"Go on, you lazy thing! What's the matter?"

"Was that the Father calling?" asked Fay demurely.

Jumping up in her turn, Tecla hastened from the room.

"I'll take your letter now," said Fay.

Dolores ran over to her, getting it out of her bosom, and shoved it into Fay's hands. Then she too gave her a little push.

"Go on," she said.

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"I am a-goin'," replied Fay; "but I think you might tell me 'thank you.'"

"Oh, thank you, then," cried the other with a stamp of her foot.

Fay opened the door and went out into the hot sunshine.

She passed by the hotel on her way to the station, where she posted the letter, and then turned back. As she approached the hotel the second time, she saw several riderless horses standing before the door, and as she went in heard men's voices behind a closed inner door, upon which she knocked.

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XXX

A MORMON EMBASSY

BY SEVEN o'clock that morning after the arrival of the soldiers at Antonito probably everybody in the San Luis Valley had breakfasted. It is not a region where men sleep late. The sun was already high and hot.

There was not much liveliness about the hotel. Houghteling, Stange, Wezel, Dumain, and the Sergeant sat in the dining-room, silently awaiting the arrival of the Mormons. Most of the men were outside in the shade cleaning their small-arms or playing cards.

Dumain finally said to Houghteling: "Are you going to send up to San Rafael this morning?"

"You seem worried lest I should forget my duties, Mr. Dumain," replied Houghteling, frigidly courteous.

The Jesuit, unruffled, answered: "I only wished to say that I must go up there this morning, and could carry any message you might wish to send."

"I have already detailed some one to go," said the other, a shade less stiffly; "it would give me great pleasure to have him carry your message, if you wish."

"I thank you," said Dumain; "but I must go in

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person. I promised Father Emanuelé, who is sick, that I would go in his place. So as to make assurance doubly sure," he added.

Houghteling kept his eyes fixed on him some moments. Then turning to Stange he said, quietly: "Have you sent that letter yet?"

Stange got up and left the room. Directly he was in again, saying: "Wivvers is coming."

The trample of many hoofs not far away could be heard.

"He is coming in force," Dumain remarked.

"He may think we want to bully him," Alfie surmised.

"No, he don't," began Wezel. "I told him you wanted him to help you fight the San Rafaelers, and if he wanted Fay Grady—"

"Who the devil told you to say that?" cried Houghteling. "Did you tell him that?" he demanded of the Sergeant.

"No, sir; I only gave him your letter: I didn't know anybody told him."

"I said that so's to explain," wheezed Wezel.

Houghteling, silent, looked appealingly at Stange, with helpless anger in his dark face.

"I don't believe any harm will come of it," put in Dumain encouragingly, as men outside were heard and partly seen dropping off their horses.

In a moment they came stamping in. Wivvers at their head, a tremendously big creature in boots, stood on the threshold looking them over.

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Behind him were eight other lesser but stalwart fellows, some in buckskin shaps, some in boots. All alike wore flannel shirts, broad felt hats, and at least one revolver.

"Mornin'," growled Wivvers, coming nearer.

"Good morning. I presume you are Mr. Wivvers," said Houghteling.

The big man nodded.

"Sit down," said Houghteling, sitting down himself.

Wivvers planted his legs firmly; but when all the receiving party sat down, he sat down too; as did all his comrades who could find chairs.

"I guess you are Captain Ho—Ho——," began Wivvers in his coarse nasal voice.

"I am Captain Houghteling."

"So you are the person what's going to get me a wife," said the Mormon insolently.

"We understood you had a wife," said Stange sarcastically.

"I said nothing in my letter, as I remember, about wives," Houghteling stated.

"Maybe you didn't say all you meant," retorted Wivvers, looking very black.

"If so, it was because I can say it to you face to face," replied the Captain, keeping calm.

"Well, fire away."

"For the time being, I am the highest representative of the United States Government in this place."

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"That's our Government," said one of the Mormons.

"I have been sent down here," continued the Captain in the tone of one that condescends to explain, "to put an end to certain illegal practices in the village of San Rafael. I needn't say that I mean the crucifixion. That is our sole purpose in coming here."

"Oh!" laughed Wivvers knowingly, nodding.

At this moment came a knock at the door.

"Come in," cried Houghteling.

Fay Grady came in.

There was a silence. Wivvers looked righteously triumphant; Fay surprised; the soldiers rather discomfited.

"I came to see Mr. Dumain," drawled Fay.

"Who is he?" Wivvers demanded.

"I am he."

"What did you come to see him for?"

"The Father sent me."

"I am a priest," said Dumain simply.

"I am an elder," said Wivvers, "and that's just as good under this free Government. I can marry people as good as you can."

"And much more frequently," laughed Alfie.

"I refer to performin' a marriage ceremony," said Wivvers impressively, his voice quivering with anger.

Houghteling rose, slapped the table smartly for silence and said: "You people are all laboring

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under a mistake. We came here, as I told you, to put down the disturbance at San Rafael. We sent for you simply to see if you wished to—to—join us in our expedition. There is no cause for quarreling. Since you feel——"

"Maybe we've got cause to quarrel," said Wivvers.

"Likely story," sneered one of the Mormons. "Didn't you bring enough soldiers to fight your own battles?"

"We didn't wish you to fight our battles," said Houghteling. "We don't intend to fight any. We only thought it well to have your moral support——"

"I don't believe a word of what you're givin' us," began Naphtali Wivvers hotly.

Houghteling flushed red. Turning to Stange, "Gad!" he said in a low voice between his teeth, and added, "I must get 'em out peaceably, though."

"You've been sent down here," Wivvers went on, "against us Saints; and you can't find out, either, that any one of us has got two wives," he fairly shouted. "So what do you do? Why, you come sneakin', spyin' round, for all the world like Indians or half-breeds, tryin' to force one of us into a polygamous marriage, so's to have evidence. That's a nice way for United States soldiers, ain't it?" Dumain and Stange and Houghteling looked at one another. "I should

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think you'd ought to be ashamed," went on the furious elder, "It's a smart trap, ain't it? But you can't ketch us," all the Mormons grumbled in assent. "You can't convict no man for his intentions, and I ain't afraid to tell you I was a-goin' to marry that there girl and the whole Valley knows it; I ain't never kep' it secret, have I?"

His supporters sang out "No," in chorus.

"I understood," said Stange clearly, "that you were waiting for her consent. Women don't like being number two."

Wivvers ground his teeth.

Fay was still standing just inside the door, her face and attitude as placid as usual.

"You needn't be afeared I'll marry her now," Naphtali sneered. "You've got that satisfaction."

"You can marry whom you damn please," said Alfie.

"And play your little hand for you," added Naphtali.

"Maybe that's what he wants?" suggested one of the Mormons. "Maybe he wants to be joined to her himself."

Alfie gave a derisive shout of laughter.

"He never saw the girl till yesterday," said Dumain.

But Wivvers grew gray with suppressed rage.

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Turning to Fay he asked in a quivering voice: "Does he want to marry you?"

Houghteling interrupted: "This has gone far enough. I give you my word of honor——"

Wivvers indicated Stange and said to Fay, "Did that man ever make love to you?"

"What nonsense!" cried Stange.

"He kissed me last night," drawled Fay.

Wivvers jumped up, oversetting his chair. His eyes fairly flamed.

"You don't mind bein' second, do you?" he roared at Stange.

Fay, with a frightened look, hurriedly added, "But he told me to marry you."

There was a moment of suspense.

"Oh," said Wivvers in a suppressed, deep voice. "I see. Afterwards——"

Houghteling stepped forward.

"Leave this house," he commanded firmly.

Wivvers's hand went instinctively to his revolver.

"We have twenty trained men to nine of you," the Captain warned him quietly.

Wivvers let go of his pistol and began to back out the door in sullen silence. Slowly the nine Saints slouched from the house. Houghteling, with the others behind him, stood in the doorway.

"Be careful," said the Captain, as the Mormons mounted, "to make no disturbance while

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we are here. You had better not come to Antonito again."

The nine men rode off at a gallop.

"Well; quite an exciting scene!" remarked Stange, turning from the door.

Houghteling gave him a withering look.

Fay Grady, who was behind Dumain, now pulled him by the sleeve and said: "Have you got any message for the Father?"

"I'll go over with you," Dumain briskly answered.

No one said a word as the two started.

Wezel stood in dejection, as if expecting the blame he deserved for his indiscretion. But Houghteling without noticing him, said to Alfie, "Come with me," and started up the rickety stairs.

Once in his own room, Houghteling closed the door and then said quietly to Stange: "You are a damned fool."

"I know it, Dan," replied Stange, looking at him sorrowfully; "but you are the only man I would let say so."

The Captain, unpacified, continued: "Didn't I tell you to drop that marriage idea?"

"I know it, Dan."

"Why did you kiss her?"

"What do you kiss any girl for?"

"This girl isn't even pretty; a fat Irish Mormon!"

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"There's a sweet complacency about her that I like," said Alfie, musing.

"Sweet complacency of a cow!"

"Besides, she's the only girl I've seen, Danny! Poor little Fay! I guess she'll never be married to that brute now. She's a good little girl, too. But I think," he said, putting his hand on his friend's arm, "your friend ought to have a share of——"

"It's all his fault," said Houghteling grimly; "just let him show me an excuse to arrest him. I wish I had arrested Wivvers, now. I was only too anxious to placate him. Having him would be even surer."

"Oh, we'll never see him again," says Alfie.

"I hope not, but I don't know."

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XXXI

FATHER CHUCHO WARNED

AS FAY and Dumain walked to the priest's house, he reproved her for her indiscretion.

"I reckon it would 'a' been best not to say nothin'," agreed the girl, "and after this I won't; but I was surprised, and I don't understand for sure what them soldiers come for anyhow."

"All that's necessary for you to understand is that you mustn't tell anything they say or do, or I say or do, to the Father or his sister or the Saints, unless I say you may."

"Well, I guess I can do that," said Fay.

Dumain found Emanuelé decidedly ailing. He told him that the soldiers and a delegation from the Mormons had had a stormy meeting in the hotel that morning, and that although he could not exactly discover the outcome, he now felt sure the expedition had to do only with Manassa. "So, if you like," he proposed, "I will go up to San Rafael to encourage them in their pious undertaking, as I now see no reason why it should not go on."

Emanuelé wrote him a letter in his tremulous hand, introducing him to the Penitente Father Maria de Jesus. But when Dumain suggested

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that he tell them to go on bravely with their ceremony Emanuelé refused, saying with senile caution that he should wait first to see if the soldiers left Antonito.

While the priest's mule-wagon was hitching to take him up, Dumain returned to the hotel on pretext of getting his beads. Houghteling and Stange had come downstairs again and were sitting smoking in the shade of the doorway.

"Have you sent your messenger yet?" inquired Dumain. "I'm just starting for San Rafael."

Houghteling very slowly blew the smoke out of his mouth. Alfie, saying nothing, raised his eyebrows at Dumain as the other at last answered: "We are going to run this expedition alone from now on."

"I see," said Dumain quietly, and went upstairs.

When he came down after a minute or two, he paused to say: "The old priest is so much alarmed that he bade me tell them under no condition to go on. I thought you might like to know it."

"Thank you," said Houghteling coolly.

The man who harnessed the mules declared that he was unable to accompany Dumain, as Señorita Tecla was sending him for medicine to La Jara, in quite an opposite direction; but he pointed out the route so carefully, that even in the puzzling monotony of the desert, Dumain

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was sure not to lose his way; and he told him where there was a wayside artesian well where he might stop to eat the lunch Fay Grady had brought him wrapped in an old Denver newspaper.

A ten-mile drive over the wastes of monotonous tawny sand, through the unmerciful sunshine, brought him to the well. It was not only too early for lunch, but he wished to be at San Rafael. Sweep the orange wastes of sand as he might, he had seen no trace of the soldiers' messenger. So he halted only long enough to let the mules drink and to bathe his wrists and glowing face in the cool water, and made on again. Before long gathered out of the mirage the brown adobe huts, and the brown adobe church with its rude belfry, which were San Rafael.

As he approached, up the slope of the hill, he was aware of two soldiers mounted waiting in front of the square church, one of whom he directly distinguished as the Sergeant. No one else was to be seen. Apparently everybody was at mass. He left the wagon in the shade of a house.

He bowed to the two soldiers as he walked toward them, who gravely saluted. Through the open church door he could barely distinguish people kneeling in a dusk against which the six altar candles stood out like drops of sunlight.

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They gleamed on the green robe of one celebrating mass.

Suddenly he halted. He had just noticed outside the door a figure of some one in a loose brown garment crouching rather than kneeling in the sand, bent under the weight of a huge cross. From him his eyes wandered again to the six or seven gaunt black crosses stuck up in the sand here and there about the hamlet. The Jesuit shuddered. Those crosses marked the graves of former cross-bearers.

"Have you waited long?" asked Dumain of the soldiers.

"Half an hour, just about," answered the Sergeant.

"It's warm," said Dumain, glancing at the brown heap under the cross.

"It is indeed, sir," the Sergeant passed his hand across his forehead

"You talk Spanish?"

"Not a word," the Sergeant shook his head.

"I dare say he knows English," said Dumain.

"I've got my letter, sir; and if he don't understand English, the Captain can write another in Spanish."

"Or I can translate it to him," suggested Dumain.

The bell began to ring; and the Jesuit immediately kneeled down behind the brown figure on the ground, making the sign of the cross. In-

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side he could see the green-robed priest before the altar. The bell rang again. Dumain covered his face with his hands. The celebrant within raised the golden chalice toward the crucifix. There was a hush. The bell rang again.

When mass was finally over, the Penitentes came out, turning at the door to bow to the altar and to make the sign of the cross; some of them assisted the cross-bearer to his feet. All were bare-footed; and the men wore long hair. They had pathetic, passionate faces. Though they all gazed at Dumain and the soldiers as they passed, none of them spoke. Silently they dispersed to their own houses, their hands still clasped as when they came from the communion rail.

Dumain watched the youth tied to the cross tremble under his burden. He could not stand upright beneath its weight. There was a numb, set expression on his regular features, as if he were oblivious of his pain.

At last the priest having laid off his celebrating robes, came out dressed in a dirty brown gown. The Sergeant, his rein over his arm, stepped forward, presenting a large letter sealed in blue wax. At the same time Dumain said in Spanish: "Be under no apprehension. I will explain."

The priest opened the letter and read slowly. Then he turned to the Sergeant with a solemn half-bow.

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"I think I understand," he said gravely.

The Sergeant, embarrassed, asked if there was an answer.

The priest thought for a moment or two.

"No, no answer," he decided.

Without another word the Sergeant and his comrade saluted, mounted, and rode off.

"This letter is too peremptory to require an answer," said the priest calmly to Dumain. "Besides——" he hesitated. "You are——"

"I come from Father Emanuelé," answered the other in Spanish; "I am a Jesuit."

He handed him his note.

"Ah, yes; I see," said the Penitente Father in the Spanish of the Valley, opening the note.

When he had read it, he took Dumain by the hand.

"Welcome, you too are holy," he said; and leaning forward kissed him on the cheek.

Then he tapped the Captain's letter with his finger again and said: "I could not send a lie for an answer; and I do not see why he should prevent our celebration."

"I was afraid you would be frightened," said Dumain.

"Ah, no; we are too much in earnest. I doubt if I could persuade my people to give it up now; and as it is, it is only to put it a few hours earlier. We will do it at sunrise. But come, let me bring

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you where you can see my flock together, or at least the most holy of them."

He led Dumain by the hand towards the largest of the adobe houses.

The door opened into a big dark room where a number of people sat on the ground in silence. The light from without fell on a highly colored plaster Pieta on the wall opposite. As his eyes grew used to the dusk, he could see on the other wall a similar plaster crucifix with Mary and John. The only furniture was a rough wooden cupboard. He now made out about a dozen squalid men and women with bright eyes.

Father Maria de Jesus spoke to one crouching figure,—a woman who seemed very old; and she bade a young girl fetch seats for the priests. The girl going into the porch brought a wooden bench. She was a pretty girl in a low-necked red waist.

"She is his sweetheart," whispered the priest to Dumain.

For some time no one said anything. Some of them seemed to be praying.

At last Maria de Jesus announced: "This is a good Father of the Holy Society of Jesus, who has been sent here by the good Father Emanuelé to encourage us in our holy undertaking."

The old woman after a moment or two replied: "The Blessed Virgin and the Blessed Archangel San Rafael bless all good Catholics."

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They all made the sign of the cross and murmured "Amen."

"She is the mother of the young man who is to receive the sacred Stigmata," explained the priest aside.

"I—I must congratulate you on the piety of your son," Dumain forced himself to say.

"The Holy Child gave me him and I devote him to the Lord," fervently responded the old woman.

"She is like blessed Hannah," chanted another woman from a dark corner.

"They are all fasting," explained Maria de Jesus to Dumain. "To-morrow is Sunday, and then of course we eat; and Monday is our holy feast."

Dumain now said: "Does the Father mention the soldiers in his letter?"

"I will see;" and he consulted the letter.

"Yes. But he says he trusts they will not disturb us."

"That is strange," says Dumain, "after their message. The Government you know does not altogether understand your mode of conferring the Stigmata. It fears the danger of some one dying."

"What is more precious than a death in God!" responded the priest. "But no soldiers should stop us."

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"However, you will wait as the Father says, for his advice about going on?"

"Ah, yes; we have great faith in Father Emanuelé. Once before he warned us to postpone our festival. But now the time is so near, I doubt if my people could be persuaded to give it up. Unless, indeed, God should take the young man to him by a miracle before Monday. But I will send Pasco down into the Valley with you."

As soon as there was a pause in this conversation, a voice thin and quavering, from the far end of the room, said: "Perhaps the strange Father will pray with us for the success of our holy enterprise."

Dumain, kneeling on the ground floor before the bench, prayed with all the spirit he could summon and in words as ambiguous as he might safely make them. During the prayer the listeners many times made the sign of the cross, and at the end said "Amen" with fervor.

This seemed a good chance to leave. At the door Dumain turned and gave them his blessing with more real feeling than he had been able to put into the prayer.

The priest went into the porch with him. On the ground beyond, the sunlight lay bright and hot.

"If you will wait here in the shade, I will fetch

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Pasco. I hope you will come to us on Monday," he said.

"I fear I shall not be in the Valley so long. But if I can, I will find out at what hour that morning the soldiers march, and let you know. You had best not go on unless they get here after——"

"Oh, I shall not go on," said the other, "unless the Father tells me to. He will know. And in any casé we shall now begin before dawn."

He went out into the sunlight to find Pasco. As Dumain waited, the pretty girl slipped out into the porch.

"I want you to do something for me," she said, softly, coming to him with great trustful eyes.

He remembered that she was the sweetheart of the creature under the cross.

"Yes, you want me——"

"To pray for him," she said fervently.

"That he may—may——"

"That he may not falter," she said with ardor; "that he may be a noble and willing sacrifice."

A fine flush of feeling spread under her dark skin down into her very bosom. With parted lips she vanished into the darkness of the house.

The Jesuit in the warmth of the porch, shivered.

He moved his lips silently, and made the sign of the cross.

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XXXII

A PRISONER IN THE PRIEST'S HOUSE

AFTER Fay had left the house to go on her errand, the Señorita Tecla soon came back into the kitchen. Pausing at the top of the three steps she exclaimed: "The Father did not call me— Oh," she said, "she is gone. I found him still asleep, but he is getting up now. I must take his breakfast in to him."

She bustled about, preparing it.

Dolores turned again from the window where she had once more been peering out, and with an abstracted stare watched her hostess.

"I wonder what that deceitful girl meant by telling me that?" pondered Tecla. "She drives me to the end of my patience," she went on, pausing in her task. "She's a Mormon, you know."

For answer Dolores merely tossed her head superciliously.

"The trouble and worry she causes me," pursued Tecla, taking up her tray.

After she had hurried from the room, Dolores, left alone, yawned two or three times, and finally sank into one of the kitchen chairs, where she soon dozed a little bit. Before long, awaking with a start, and finding herself still alone, she sat for a while in reverie. Then getting up, she

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wandered over to the outer door, and opening it, stood there a minute or two, leaning on the post, at the edge of the sunshine. After a while she went a few steps out into the bare yard, and after looking aimlessly about, tried by standing on tiptoe to look over the high fence. Finding this impossible she strolled back to the house, and was standing again leaning in the doorway, in the large morning silence, when hearing a hand on the other door, she glided in, and softly shut her door behind her.

It was Tecla again. She came down the steps and took a chair.

"Would you like to see the church?" she asked amicably, raising her old eyes to her guest.

Dolores shook her head with disdain.

Pursing her lips a little, Tecla opened a black book she had brought in with her, and said a shade more coolly: "The Father is not feeling well enough to say his mass this morning, so I am going to read some prayers. Would you like to read with me?"

Again Dolores shook her head.

"You can read?" queried Tecla.

"Of course I can," cried the girl, waking up. "I'm sick of prayers. Father Chucho mumbled them all the way down."

She fixed a firm look of defiance on Tecla.

"Are you a Catholic?" said that good woman frigidly.

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"Yes, I am," sneered the girl, mockingly; "as good a one as you."

"You said you hoped the soldiers would stop the sacred festival of the——"

"Sacred festival!" jeered Dolores. "Sacred murder! Indians!"

Tecla started in pious horror, but she persisted firmly: "Father Maria de Jesus says you are very sinful; and now you refuse to pray."

Dolores gave a shout of exasperation, her face fairly blazing, and then stopped short, turned her back to Tecla, and with a swing of the hips started towards the outside door.

"Where are you going?" gasped Tecla, jumping up.

Dolores turned again. "I'm tired of all of you," she said, bitterly, and with a wicked look. "I'm going to see the soldiers."

"Indeed you're not!" cried Tecla hotly.

Both made a simultaneous spring towards the door, but as the girl tried to pull it open Tecla, leaning her whole frail weight against it, succeeded in turning the key and drawing it from the lock.

"Indeed you won't," she repeated, panting with excitement and rage. Her usually pale face was red with her exertion.

Dolores, standing close to her, glared at her, clenching her teeth. Her hands worked ner-

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vously. They were so near they felt each other's breath.

There was something in the old woman's eyes as strong as Dolores. The girl fell back a step or two.

"I'm not a prisoner!" she exclaimed, affecting a laugh. "I will go out when I want to."

Tecla continued to pant and pant.

At last she said, "You will not!"

Dolores compressed her lips and glanced from right to left. She tapped with her foot on the floor.

"If you go now, you shan't have your money. If you go now, you shan't come back."

"I shall have my money," cried Dolores passionately.

"The priest told me to keep you."

"Curse him," cried Dolores in a fury.

She looked again fixedly at her persecutor; her bosom heaved and fell; her cheeks were red, but her lips were gray. With a sudden turn, she ran straight for the other door. "I will go out when I wish," she exclaimed.

Tecla started after her.

At this moment that door opened, and Fay Grady appeared. While the other two, recoiling slightly, stood for an instant fixed, she regarded them with a gaze of mild wonder. Dolores, scenting another possible opponent, eyed her narrowly. Seizing this chance, Tecla, with a ner-

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vous dash, darted past her, and stumbling up the three steps, almost knocking Fay down, she had slammed the door from the outside and locked it before they quite realized her move.

Fay's mouth dropped somewhat; she continued to stare wonderingly at the other girl.

Dolores shrugged her shoulders, and again laughed coldly.

"Fool!" she exclaimed. "Don't stand there like a cow."

To this Fay returned rather a scornful glance.

"I will go out when I want," proclaimed the other.

"I ain't no more of a fool than you are," said Fay with her usual self-poise. "I can go out whenever I feel like, without her knowing it, if I want to."

"How do you do it?" asked Dolores, almost mildly.

"You can go out easy at night," suggested Fay.

"I'll go now if I want," repeated the other. "I'll go and see the soldiers, whenever I want."

As she paced restlessly about, she put her foot against a chair, and petulantly pushed it over.

Fay turned her head to look at it where it lay, and then gave her equable attention again to Dolores, and remarked: "It wouldn't do no good to go now. They're all pretty mad."

This seemed to strike Dolores. But after a

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moment of thought she announced, "I want to see them."

"They ain't so much to see," said Fay.

Dolores looked her over, up and down; and then asked: "Did you send my letter?"

"Yes, I put it in the box," replied Fay.

The other girl considered again.

"Don't you believe she'd let me come back if I went out?" she asked.

"No, I don't. I know she wouldn't," said Fay.

"I could get my money, anyhow."

Fay gazed at her with the vacant look of one who has no opinions.

Dolores pouted and frowned, thinking.

"Well, I'll stay till to-night, anyway," she announced.

The key of the inner door was heard being turned in the lock.

Tecla, after flying from the kitchen, had hastened to her brother's study to lay before him the case of the rebellious new-comer; but finding him occupied with Dumain, she had discreetly closed his study door again and waited in the hall. Her excitement cooled somewhat while she waited, and when the two priests appeared and the Jesuit, politely bowing to her, left the house, she was ready to listen to her brother's request for her to put up a lunch and have the wagon hitched; but though dutifully she set out

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to arrange this, without telling him now about Dolores, it was with misgivings that she returned to the kitchen and unlocked the prison.

She found Dolores also much calmer, but when the girl, with haughty silence, came directly towards her, Tecla was alert to set her shoulders once more against the door, and to demand where she was going.

"I'm going up to my room," returned Dolores, superciliously. "I'm sleepy. I suppose I can do that?"

There was no deceit in this bold front, and Tecla, making way for her to pass, waited only to watch her actually going up the stairway, and then turned with her orders to Fay Grady.

An hour later, when Dumain had been sped off to San Rafael, Tecla bethought herself again of her new charge, and creeping up the stairs and through the passage way, she laid her ear to the closed door of the front room she had assigned to Dolores. There was no sound to be heard. Craftily turning the key in the lock, Tecla was creeping away again, when she heard some one flying to the door, throwing herself against it, trying the knob again and again, and pounding and kicking. Tecla went back to the door and said sternly: "You'd better keep still."

Her only answer was a torrent of hot words, so awful that she shrank away and hastily retreated downstairs. As she went she heard loud

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and passionate sobbing from behind the door, and then more pounding. Directly followed such a tearing shriek as made her shudder, and after that at intervals came agonizing screams, like the cries of a child insane with anger. During an hour or more these distressing sounds continued, shrill and heart-rending. Fay Grady paid no attention to them whatever. Tecla would jump at each succeeding one, put her fingers to her ears, sigh, and press her lips tighter. Father Emanuelé, sick as he was, seemed too torpid to be disturbed by the noise, though he did ask his sister what it meant, and even asked her if she hadn't better release the girl and let her go her way.

Tecla steeled herself against such a surrender, but ultimately her nerves were so wrought upon by the screams that she was on the point of giving in, when all at once they ceased. So great seemed the silence, that she presently stole up to the door again, fearing that in some way the girl might have escaped. After listening a few moments, regular heavy breathing seemed to indicate that she was asleep.

Nothing more was heard from her all day. Venturing up with some supper, Tecla made sure the prisoner was still sleeping before she gently unlocked the door and slid in the tray. And when she went to bed, there was still no sound from that room.

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XXXIII

DEVLIN RETURNS

DELOSS DEVLIN belonged in the East, or at any rate what is considered the East in Colorado, and he had intended going back there soon after his visit to the Jesuit College in Denver. But as he had nothing to do, and as he knew that, though he was by no means an invalid, the tonic air of Colorado was considered good for him, he had lingered several weeks longer. It was only on the 20th of October that, suddenly remembering that the feast of San Rafael came in four days, he as suddenly realized that it was his unusual interest in the Penitentes that had kept him so long in that region. As he thought of them again, he was once more singularly moved. Curiosity, if not sympathy, drew him back to the great placid sunshine of the San Luis Valley. Idler that he was, there was no reason not to go whither he would. His cousin's ranch was almost in the very shadow of Blanca, only a few miles from Antonito. He would go see what the Jesuits had really thought to do, if anything. He telegraphed to his cousin.

Next day came an answer that none of the family was in the Valley. But his mind was now

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set; and remembering the one-eyed host at Antonito, he took the train, and arrived the day after the soldiers and Dumain.

After the precipitate departure of the Mormons, Alfred Stange had spent the greater part of the day reading a torn French novel he found in the bar. He was sitting there, with a glass of beer on the table beside him, poring over the last pages, that afternoon, when he almost subconsciously heard the clanging and wheezing of the train, and its final decreasing roar and hum, off into the silence. A minute or two later he heard a strange voice talking to Wezel outside the open front door. Raising his eyes languidly from his book, he could not, from where he sat, see who it was, nor could he catch the talk. Again a minute or so, and he looked up to have a glimpse of a young man crossing before the door of the bar-room, and heard him go upstairs. Then Wezel limped into the room and got the precious register off the bar. To a question of Stange's, he only wheezed an unintelligible reply as he limped out again; but when he presently returned and deposited the book in its place, he shuffled over the ink-tracked leaves, and running his finger along the line, read aloud: "D—E—Deloss Devlin. That's who he is. Why, he's been here before."

"Who is the gent?" Stange asked, getting up,

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and kicking the stiffness out of his knees, as he went over to see.

"I don't know who he is," said Wezel. "He was here one day a month or so gone, and asked me questions about the Penitentes, 's if I was a witness on the stand; and then he went over to see old Emanuelé. And now this time, the first thing he asks me, 'Is there any Jesuits here?' "

"Any!" said Stange. "One's enough. What does he want? Whole schools of 'em?"

"Maybe he might be one hisself," suggested Wezel, coughing.

Stange put one hand to his head with a theatric gesture of despair, and sighed.

"Gee! It was bad enough when only Luke was with us! But I guess I'll go up and advise Dan about this."

With his hands in his pockets, he strolled up to Houghteling's room and kicked on the door. The Captain was at a small table, busily writing.

"What do you want?" he said rather curtly, as Stange idled in, whistling, and banged the door to with his foot.

"A cheerful greeting first, Danny," replied Alfie, pleasantly. "You are so good-humored. Do you remember, Emerson says——"

"Cut all that," put in Houghteling. "Don't you see I'm busy?"

"Can it be!" exclaimed Alfie, raising his two hands. "Well, here's to make you more so." He

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came around in front of his friend and sat on the corner of the table.

"Get off, you—you child!" growled Houghteling, giving him a push that sent him nearly sprawling.

Stange returned, good-natured as ever, and again sat on the papers on the table. Houghteling looked up at him with a lurking smile in his vexed black eyes.

"A young gentleman has just come," began Stange, marking his words with one forefinger, "who is strongly suspected by Peter Wezel and me to be in the hire of the Jesuits, if he is not actually one of those insidious persons himself."

"Come? From where?" asked the other.

"From the late arriving train," explained Alfie. "Do you forget we are still in the land of civilization and progress? How did you suppose he came? In an aëromotor?"

Houghteling leaned back in his chair.

"Well, why don't you go to him and find out——"

"Just what I came to inform you I was going to do."

"You have my permission," said the Captain gravely.

"Go on!" laughed Stange, and gave his superior officer a light slap on the cheek.

"Find out what he came for," continued Houghteling, laying a hand on Alfie's knee.

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"Just what I intended to do," said Stange.

"And—well, for heaven's sake go, and don't bother me."

Stange laughed again, got up, and with a passing punch between Houghteling's broad shoulders, strolled out again. In the dim hallway he stood for a few moments, twisting his yellow mustache consideringly. At last he knocked on the door and then went in. Devlin, who was standing in his undershirt, shaving before a clouded mirror, turned his face half covered with lather. Stange, rubbing one hand over his own jaw, remarked mockingly to himself, "He'll be cutting me out," and as the other stood silent, waiting for him to begin, went on aloud, hesitating as if a trifle embarrassed: "I hope you will pardon my intruding on your privacy, Mr. Devlin."

"Don't mention it," answered Devlin, gravely. The lather quite concealed any expression around his mouth.

"You'd better go on shaving before the soap gets dry," said Stange in his usual good-humored fashion, and sitting down in a chair. "Don't mind me."

The other young man accordingly turned toward the spotty mirror again, and attacked one side of his face gingerly. He scraped for a moment or two, and wiped his razor on a bit of newspaper, before saying: "Is there anything I

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can do for you? I can listen while I shave, even if I can't talk."

Stange, who had drawn a silver case from one trousers pocket and a loose match or two from the other, went on lighting his cigarette. He made a motion of offering one to his host, but remarking, "Of course, you can't," put away the case. Then he blew a long whiff or two rather nervously, and finally answered, with a frank look at the other's dim reflection in the smoky mirror: "I did have a speech all made up to spring on you, quite a diplomatic one, too; but speeches to——," he paused to inhale and blow another whiff. "I believe it pays to be honest. You aren't much older than I am, and as far as I can see, you haven't got that hang-dog, foxy look——. The truth is, old man, you're suspected of being in with the Jesuit in this game." Alfie looked relieved when this was said, and knocked off his cigarette.

Devlin finished an up-stroke or two on his throat, and then calmly asked: "What game?"

Stange laughed.

"That's good!" he said. "Still," he considered, "this isn't a barracks, is it? I forgot it's a public hotel in a free land, and a chap might come here without having anything to do with the Penitentes one way or another. Though God may know what he'd want in this hole,—I don't."

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"You are here, then, about the Penitentes?" asked Devlin.

"Of course, we are! Of course, we are! Old Dumain wants to persuade us we're not, or at any rate to make out we're not. But we aren't for his diplomatic bluffs; we're United States soldiers, and we're above all subterfuge. We came down here to clean out the crucifiers. And I say, let's do it, and get home."

Devlin, who was rubbing his reddened chin, shook his head.

"Oh, you are for 'em, then, are you?" said Stange, quickly.

"For them? No. What I meant was, it seems awfully cruel to be harsh with them."

"Ah, hell!" drawled Stange derisively.

The other reddened a trifle more.

"However, I see you're not with old Dumain," Stange pursued. "You wouldn't be so candid if you were; and, besides, he has an entirely different scheme from yours. But we were sent here to run this circus."

"I'm really sorry you were," said Devlin.

Then he plunged his face into his washbowl of water. When he raised it, spluttering, and began to dry it with a towel, Stange asked, as if indifferently: "Why that courteous remark? 'Fraid we'll botch it?"

"I don't know how you happened to be sent here," answered Devlin; "but I have an idea that

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I was the original person to spread the information of the need there was for something being done to put an end to these crucifixions, and I should feel guilty if I had brought death and destruction down on those poor, misguided fanatics."

"Death and destruction, in the shape of me and my like!" said Stange ironically. "What peaceful method would you have employed to stamp out murder?"

"I tried to start the peaceful method that seemed best to me," Devlin replied seriously to the banterer. He had put on his shirt and coat, and now sat down opposite Stange. "And that was to inform the Jesuit College about it and——"

"You did?" cried Alfie, sitting bolt upright. "You got old Dumain sent down here?"

"I don't know whom they sent. If he's a Jesuit, I suppose I did."

"You thought that was the best way to put down this thing! Why, even Dumain only wants to make use of us."

"I did think so," Devlin admitted serenely.

"Well of all—" Alfie jumped up—"asinine, short-sighted——"

Devlin jumped up too, now fiery red. "I'll be damned!" he said, and glared at Alfie.

Stange at once melted in laughter. "Hell! Don't be mad! old man," he said. "I beg your

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pardon. I dare say people do have different ways of looking at things." He seized Devlin's reluctant hand and shook it. "Have a cigarette." He offered him one, patting him on the back the while. "Come down stairs and have a drink with me. I'm sure you're not in old Dumain's party."

Devlin took the cigarette, but while lighting it, shook his head and said: "I'm not so sure. Not till I hear what his party is anyway."

Again Stange clouded. Patting his breast downward with both hands, he put one inside his blouse and brought out a soiled time-table. As he unfolded it, and ran his finger down one page, he said: "If you're not sure, you may make more trouble for us; and in that case, I advise you to get out. Dan is sure to suspect you; and if he does, I shall, because I won't be insubordinate. There's a train up at ten-ten; there's one to Creede at midnight,—take your choice. But if you stay, and if you aid and abet that Jesuit, I tell you now you're in danger of being put under martial law. And after all," he considered, "I don't see what you're here for unless it is to help him out. We didn't want you. Oh, dear; why are these sly schemers so open and candid? Just let me look if you've got a tonsure."

"All I came for was, I suppose, idle curiosity," said Devlin, smiling. "I had got up some interest in one or two of these people down here, and I thought I'd come and see it out. I had no

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idea you soldiers would be here. But I have no intention of leaving because you are."

"Good!" cried Stange. "I like that. Well, I'll tell you," he added candidly; "the man who wants them cleaned out with fire and sword is your friend the Jesuit. We only want to block their game."

Suddenly he put his hand to his ear. "Sh! Didn't I hear a wagon? There's some one coming upstairs." After a look out of the window, he exclaimed: "It's Dumain back. You must excuse me. I'll see you later."

He hurried from the room, leaving Devlin with a smile on his face. Rattling down the stairs to the door, Stange gazed for a moment or two at a handsome youth with high cheek-bones and straight black hair, who sat in the mule-wagon holding the lines. Then with a sudden decision he went out to him and said, "How are you?"

The young man, blankly shaking his head, replied in Spanish.

"Hell!" said Alfie.

Dumain, with his carpet-bag, then reappeared.

"I've been trying to talk with your friend," says Stange.

"Oh, he's a Penitente."

"Come on a visit, I suppose."

"I believe he's going back in the morning," said Dumain, getting into the wagon.

"And you are going to leave us, too?"

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"I am going to stay with Father Emanuelé, to-night. He's pretty sick."

"Well, good-bye. See you again, I hope. Be good!"

As Stange turned to go in he heard Devlin's voice from above calling, "Oh, Father Dumain!" and as he went up the stairs he met that young man coming down.

"You will incur suspicion. I warn you," he said jokingly as he passed him.

He hurried on upstairs and burst into Houghteling's room.

"The Jesuit's got a new game! His stunt of talking Spanish before the Sergeant was good; but now he's brought down a dago and has deserted over to Emanuelé's camp."

"Brought down—What for?" asked Houghteling.

"Well, I couldn't exactly gather why. You know the lucid way he has of explaining things. But I guess it's only a messenger."

"We must intercept any message they send, and read it," Houghteling spoke decisively.

"How'll we manage it?" asked Alfie, lighting a cigarette.

"There's only one spy we can get in that house."

"Who's that?"

"Fay Grady, of course."

"Pretty spy she'd make. Blew once."

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"But I don't believe she will again," said Houghteling. "So you'd better see her, Alf, and——"

"Now, look here, Houghteling, I'm done with that girl."

"You're her friend. You'll have to arrange it."

"I got you into trouble once through her, hang it."

"Well, we're rid of the Mormons."

"I'm likely to do it again," said Alfie hopelessly.

"Don't be a fool. Go and arrange."

"Is it a command?" Alfie wore a very worried look.

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Well, wait till the sun is down, Danny," and Alfie leaned back to enjoy his cigarette.

Suddenly he got up as if a new thought had just struck him.

"Young Devlin's down there talking to Dumain," he said, and going to the window, added, "Yes, he is! Getting his orders, I guess."

"Do you think this one is a Jesuit?" asked Houghteling.

"No, I don't. But I'm hanged if I can see what he came here for."

"What does he say he came for?"

"Curiosity," laughed Alfie, wrinkling his brow. "I can imagine a man going to New York out of curiosity, but——. He's been here before, too.

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I wonder if he's gone on Fay Grady. I bet that's it."

"We must keep an eye on him," said Houghteling; "as long as he stays here, and the other one there, he's pretty safe, I guess. You might go down, though, and see what they're saying."

Meanwhile the mule-wagon had drawn up, and Devlin had gone down to it.

"My name is Devlin," he began.

Dumain, leaning down from the seat, cordially reached a hand to him. "I am sure, Mr. Devlin——"

"It was I who carried the rumor of this crucifixion to Father Mansifee——"

"Then," said Dumain, blandly, "you have done a good work."

"I fear our views about it may not be just the same," suggested Devlin. "These soldiers——"

"Oh, we wanted them sent down,—I assure you—"

"They tell me, however, that you and they do not quite agree."

Dumain sadly shook his head. "They resent suggestions," he said; "which, as they are young, is natural. But their idea of *laisser-aller,* I must say, seems short-sighted."

"Surely you would not have them kill these poor misguided people," objected the young man.

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"No, no; I do not wish them to be killed. But —a—a mere proclamation of martial law hardly seems likely to be as useful as a very gentle—rout—shall I say? However, they tell me they have decided on their plans; and so I shall interfere no more. Knowing myself *non grata*, I am leaving them to their own devices."

Noting a slight change of voice in the last half of this speech, Devlin glanced behind him, and saw Alfred Stange sauntering towards them.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that it seems to me they are right."

"I am sorry to hear you say it," returned Dumain with a bow. "Good evening."

He touched Pasco on the arm; and the wagon rolled off, as Devlin turned to meet Stange.

"Well met at Phillipi!" Alfie greeted him; "has the diplomat brought you over to his views?"

They turned back towards the hotel together.

"No, he has not," replied Devlin gravely; "I think his views are barbarous. And I am very glad you are not going to change your plans at all for him."

They halted at the door.

"Damn dusty country this is," remarked Stange, putting his feet on the bench one after the other, and wiping his shoes with his handkerchief.

"He says he is not going to try to interfere with you any more," continued Devlin.

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Stange raised his eyebrows at him. "Look here, my young friend," he said, "that sounds suspicious to me. Don't be offended, but I think I shall continue to suspect you."

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XXXIV

A SEARCH FOR A LETTER

IT WAS not till after supper that Alfred Stange started off on his errand. He left Houghteling and Devlin sitting side by side on the bench, but not conversing very cordially.

There was a golden moon which shone so brightly that it was very light. All was quiet in Antonito. Somewhere a dog howled once. Stange went straight to the large yard into which the kitchen opened. Through the window he saw Tecla, Dumain, and the dark youth at supper, with Fay Grady in bright green waiting upon them. He noticed how intently she stared with her big gray eyes at the handsome stranger, who hardly took his eyes from her face. The girl looked as stupidly placid as ever.

He went as near the window as he dared. No one was talking. After what seemed a great while, he heard Tecla say sharply: "Take that in to the Father and see if he wants some."

Without waiting for more, Stange ran to the fence he had climbed the night before; climbed it now in the opposite direction; and was inside the open front door before Fay reached the door of the study.

"Oh!" said Fay, startled; and nearly dropped a tea-cup.

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"I must speak to you."

Fay now said, "Oh," in her natural drawl. "I didn't know you at first."

"When can I speak to you?"

"Now, I guess, if you want to."

"No, no," said Alfie hastily. "She might come out here. After supper; can I?"

"Is it important?" drawled Fay.

"Yes, very. Will you come to the well again?"

"That don't give no time. And she says I need too much water. If you wait about an hour, I can come in the church."

"How shall I get in?"

"It's always open."

"Well, good-bye; remember!" and he slipped out as fast as he had slipped in.

He walked out through the garden and to the steps of the church, where he sat in a dark corner, slowly smoking cigarettes, till he had smoked six, before he decided it was time for Fay to be coming.

She, in the meantime, had given Emanuelé his tea, had gone back and finished waiting on the others, and then had had her own supper; while Tecla took the two guests up-stairs to show them to their rooms. After that Fay had washed the dishes as quickly as possible; and had just about finished when Tecla came back to the kitchen, having seen her sick brother safe in bed.

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"Now," she said to Fay, "I've been so driven all day I haven't had time to teach you anything. But here is the book and we'll have a little reading before I retire."

Fay slowly dried her plump hands on the dish-towel, without saying anything.

"Hurry! I'm tired."

"So am I," answered Fay serenely, hanging up her apron; "and I'm going to bed."

She marched from the wrathful presence of her mistress with what would have been dignity in a thinner person,—if she hadn't stumbled up the three steps. She heard her mistress's sharp voice behind her; but without waiting to hear what it was saying, she shut the door and went upstairs to her own room. Holding the door ajar, she stood there in the dark, till in a few minutes she heard Tecla creep up the stairs and then turn a handle; after that all was still.

Then Fay left her room and went carefully down the stairs, feeling for each step. Through the study she passed into the sacristy, and so on into the chancel, and down to the body of the dark church.

"Can any one hear us in here, talking?" asked a voice somewhat muffled.

"No," answered Fay in her natural tone; "where are you?"

"Here."

With her hand outstretched in front of her,

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Fay cautiously stepped towards the voice and the red glow of the cigarette she could see in the blackness. A hand touched hers. There came a puff of smoke in her face.

"I can't see you at all," she said in her monotonous fashion.

Alfie laughed close to her ear.

"I sympathize with you. But," he went on as if all on business bent, "I must tell you what we want."

"I ain't goin' to tell no one again anything you say or do," she protested; "Father Dumain told me I dassn't."

Her voice, though low, was clear and sweet.

Alfie felt about and grasped one of her hands; then took out his cigarette, put his arm round her, and kissed her—a long, long kiss in the darkness.

"We want you," he said when he finished, "to get the letter they send to San Rafael; and you mustn't let Dumain know about this. Can you?" he asked, squeezing her warm hand.

"I don't know, I guess I could;" she didn't squeeze back.

"Are you sure no one can hear us?"

"They're all upstairs in bed; and anyway, they couldn't."

Alfie was beginning to distinguish things in the dark. He drew Fay by the hand into one of the pews.

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"Let's sit down. Have a cigarette?" he asked, getting another for himself.

"What would I do with it?" asked Fay.

He laughed again. "I guess you don't want one. Then you will get it," he went on; "and bring it to us without any one's knowing it—. Can you get out this way any time? Bring it to us to read; and then you've got to bring it back and put it where you found it and not let any one at all know; Dumain or anybody. Do you think you can do that?"

"I reckon so," said Fay. "They've wrote it already. I seen that dark fellow put one in his pocket, and I can go to his room now and get it easy enough, if he is asleep."

"All right, I'll wait here. But can you get into his room?" he asked, as Fay got up to go.

"They ain't no key," said Fay simply.

"Well, I'll wait outside. I don't like it in here."

He heard her walk away cautiously; and then he went out on the steps.

Fay Grady meanwhile felt her way into the house and up the stairs. Thinking to go to the room where Pasco was, she stole carefully to that occupied by Dumain. The door was outlined in light and a ray came through the keyhole. Her eyes opened wider as she saw Dumain stripped to the skin, lustily doing calisthenics. He was a slim, firmly-built man, an evident be-

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liever in muscular Christianity. She watched him touch his toes forty times without bending his knees, and then as often do the tiring gymnastic feat called by athletes the "squat."

Then she rose, gingerly holding her skirts to keep them from rustling; and breathing very softly, tiptoed to the other spare room. Here she took the precaution of listening till she could hear the regular breathing of sleep, when she gently pushed open the door and went in. There was enough light to distinguish clothes hanging on a hook. She felt for the coat and took it down. The letter was not in the pocket where she had seen Pasco put it, nor in any of the others. She hung the coat up, and felt in the trousers pockets. No letter there; only some string, a piece of tobacco, and a few small coins. One of these fell rattling on the floor. As she stooped for it, the man in bed waked and sat up. Fay stood quite still. He sat quiet for a moment, then sighed; and lying down, turned over and went to sleep again.

Fay crept from the room.

She was starting down-stairs again when she heard the door knob of Dolores's room being violently rattled. For a moment she hesitated. Then going to the door she softly unlocked it. It was immediately pulled open from the inside.

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"Sh," said Fay quietly; "you'll wake her up."

She could see the other girl's figure outlined against the moon-lighted window.

"I knew it was you," said Dolores in a low tone; "I saw that soldier man come and go in the church, and I heard you coming up."

She did not mention that she had also seen, after Stange had gone into the church, a rider whom she recognized as Cristobal, lurking in the shadows round about and spurring his horse swiftly across the tracts of moonshine; and that she had cautiously called to him, but without making him hear.

"I want to go down and speak to that soldier," she said, scarcely above her breath.

"I reckon you can go down if you want to," said Fay. "She's asleep, and I won't never tell."

"I'm not scared of her," returned Dolores defiantly; "but I don't know the way out in the dark. All those doors are locked."

"No, they ain't," returned Fay; "not goin' into the church."

"Is he in the church?"

"No, he's on the steps. He said he didn't like it in there."

"Bring him in there. I must see him in there. I must see him."

"I guess you can go outside an' see him, as good as I can," said Fay, moving on.

Dolores put a hand on her shoulder, which

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Fay twisted off. "No, no! I must see him in there. I can't go out. Cristobal—"

"Well, I won't tell him to come in," replied Fay, moving off.

"Why not? You're jealous. You love him."

"I do not," said Fay firmly.

"Why won't you, then?"

"I don't see why I should," said Fay.

They were at the head of the stairs now, and Fay started down. Again Dolores laid hold of her so tightly that this time she could not escape.

"I'll tell the man you love—the Mormon—if you don't," she said tragically.

Fay laughed inwardly. "You don't know where to find him, and I don't care anyhow."

"I'll tell Señorita,—I'll tell her now,—I'll wake her—I'll scream."

"Come on," said Fay, a trifle faster than usual, "I'll bring him in."

They went down noiselessly together. Telling Dolores to wait, Fay went out through the church. It was warmer outside. She smelled the smoke from Stange's cigarette; he was sitting on the dark church steps.

"Have you got it?" he said.

"No," answered Fay.

"Damn it! Why not?"

"It wasn't in his pockets, any of them."

"Where was it?"

"I don't know."

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"A lot of good you are!"

He got up sullenly and started off without another word.

"Wait a minute," she called after him.

Alfie hesitated. Then he walked on again a step or two. Then he stopped. Fay came down after him.

"There's another girl in there," she said, "and she wants to see you."

"What does she want to see me about?"

"I don't know. I told her I'd tell you. She's an Indian girl."

"The hell you say!" he exclaimed curtly; "is she a Penitente?"

"No, she said she wasn't. But she's been up there. She's an awful girl; she was screaming almost all day."

"Well, I suppose my duty urges me to interview even this virago," said Alfie, professing to speak dejectedly. "Trot her out."

"She won't come out," replied Fay; "she's waiting for you inside."

"Ah, I'm sick of church! But come on."

They went into the church; and a dark figure moved through the darkness toward them.

"This is the Indian girl," announced Fay, and then moved ponderously away in the gloom.

Though Stange could not see the instant look of hatred that Dolores flung after her at this, he heard her mutter "Pig!—I spit on you, heretic."

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Then with a voice soft through her rage, she turned to him. "No, no, Señor; I am not Indian; I am Spanish,—Castilian!"

"Don't mention it," said Stange.

After rolling a cigarette between his two hands, he struck a match. As the bold little flame flared up, he caught sight for a moment of the great altar, solemn in the dusk, with its crucifix above it. With a sudden impulse he dropped the match and set his heel upon it.

"Give me one, too," said Dolores softly, touching his hand with hers.

"No, I won't," he answered curtly; "it isn't decent to smoke in here."

He drew his hand away from her.

"Are you a Penitente?" he asked.

"No, no! I am not." There was a thrill of hate in her deep voice. "I despise them."

Stange struck another match, and in its light looked curiously on her face.

"I like to see whom I'm talking to," he explained, dropping the match as it burnt him.

"Do you think I'm pretty?" she asked insinuatingly, moving closer to him.

"Pretty enough," replied Stange cavalierly, edging away.

"Ah, I see," she said softly; "I see why you don't like me."

"I do like you well enough. I don't know you," answered Stange, a trifle uncomfortable.

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"Well enough," she repeated with feeling, and laid one soothing hand on his shoulder.

Stange shook it off. "Come, none of that."

"I know," she persisted coaxingly, "you are in love with the little fat girl."

He answered with a hollow laugh, which he followed up rather hotly: "If I were, it doesn't concern you."

Dolores sighed feelingly.

"I—perhaps I am in love—" she hinted.

"I dare say you are,—dozens of times. You seem susceptible."

There was a pause.

"Come, now; for God's sake, what do you want? I can't stay here forever."

"I wanted you to do something for me," said Dolores petulantly.

"Well; out with it."

"What are you going to do to the Penitentes? Kill them?"

"No, we're not. Not going to kill one of them."

"Oh! I thought you would," said Dolores, disappointed.

"Sorry we can't oblige you. Any one you'd specially like killed?"

"Yes, yes," said the girl eagerly; "will you? She's wicked, wicked! She's a murderer."

"She is, indeed? Who is she? Whom did she murder?"

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"She is murdering him," pursued Dolores; "Paez, my lover. She prayed to the Saints. She —she did something—she made them choose him. He goes round with the big cross on him, and it's crushing him to death; and it's her fault."

"I see," said Alfie; "we're going to end that part. But you say he's your lover. Isn't there a little jealousy mixed in this?"

"No, no! He loved me. He wouldn't look at her. She was jealous. She made them do it. She is a murderer. Will you kill her?" Again she laid an eager hand on his arm.

"My dear girl, what you want is a policeman. Soldiers don't go round hunting down crimes."

Dolores paused; then said inquiringly, "No? Don't they?"

Alfie shook his head in the dark.

"Oh, I thought you could do it," sighed Dolores.

"My dear girl, I'll do anything I can for you—in reason. Don't expect me to slay your personal enemies, though. What is her name?"

"Fanita," said Dolores in a hoarse whisper.

"Very well. I'll remember. Now I think you had better go to bed. You're getting nervous." He made a start towards the door.

Once more he felt her hand on his arm.

"Here! Quit that, will you?" he exclaimed, shaking her off, and moving faster.

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Dolores followed close behind him out on to the steps.

"Promise," urged Dolores. "Promise, will you?"

"Promise what?" he asked, exasperated.

"If you do anything to them, do it to her too."

As they came out Stange had noticed the figure of a man, who was strolling past the church. At the sound of their speaking he had halted; and now a new voice, that of Devlin, broke in on them.

"Dolores!"

The girl drew back a little.

"Good night," said Stange hurriedly, seizing his opportunity. "I'll leave you with your friend." As he passed Devlin, he said to him, "Wish you a pleasant scene. I guess it's safe,—you couldn't plot with her on the Penitentes' side; but be careful of your heart."

He turned and walked quickly back to the hotel. The moon was setting, and the air began to grow a little damper and cooler.

He found Houghteling sitting in front of the hotel, smoking a pipe.

"Hello, Dan," said Stange. "The little beast didn't get it."

"Did she peach?"

"No, she didn't peach; but she didn't get the letter. Women are useless creatures, any-

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way. It's been written. 'Wrote,' as she said."

"We'll have to have it," said the other. "If necessary I'll have the messenger seized as he takes it back."

"What's the extra guard for?" asked Stange, sitting down by him.

"Those Mormons are on my mind."

"Ho!" said Stange, "I bet they've forgotten us. 'Quick to wrath—', you know."

"This quarrel was about a woman," said Houghteling gravely.

"So it was, clever lad! Well, I never expect to see them again.

"I'm not so sure," said Houghteling.

"By the way," Alfie began, after a pause; "there is another girl there, too. I don't like her."

"Who is she?" Houghteling asked.

"Kind of a Penitente reconcentrada, I should say. Hates 'em like sin—more than sin, probably. Regular tragedy actress."

"Why didn't you get her to get the letter."

"No, sir! Give me a slow, quiet girl for a job like that. Fay's clumsy, but—"

"She didn't get it."

"She didn't let anybody in that she was trying to. This neurotic damsel might have got into Dumain's room and had the letter in her hand, but I swear before she brought it out, I believe

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she'd have waited and waked him up so as to use her wiles to get him to kiss her."

"Did she get you to?"

"She did not! When a girl is too anxious to have a kiss from yours truly, she generally gets thrown down. I tell you those! I may be old-fashioned, but I think it's a prerogative of the gentleman to make the advances."

It was some little while after this when Stange remarked: "By the way, Dan, it seems to me you're careless about our suspicious friend, Devlin."

"He's up in his room," said Houghteling.

"Oh, is he? Then his double's down there by the church flirting with that warm-hearted girl."

Houghteling jumped up and looked toward the second-story windows. "There's a light in his room. He went up there while I was seeing about the guard."

"I repeat my last remark," said Alfie, carelessly. "He gave you the slip."

"Then you better go back and see what he's doing."

"Oh, hell, Dan! I'm tired. I've been running your errands all day long."

While Stange leaned back comfortably against the house-front, Houghteling tacitly started down the road. In a moment Stange was after him, and flinging both arms about his Captain

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almost had pulled him backward off his feet.

"Go on home!" he said to him with mock sternness. "Of course I'll go."

Fay, on leaving the church, went slowly up stairs, retracing her way through the darkness. The light still shone from Dumain's room. With an instinctive impulse she picked her way there again, holding her breath and feeling along the wall. She was a little giddy from so much walking in the dark. As before, she kneeled and looked in. Dumain, in a white night-gown, sat by his table writing. By looking intently she could see that there was a heavy black monogram on one sheet of paper, which he twice held up under the lamp, and read carefully. He shook his head in doubt. Then he set to work writing. At last she saw him blot his writing, tear the monogram sheet in two, fold another one and put it into an envelope, and then get up and put the envelope and the torn letter, as she could just see by holding her head very low, into the pocket of a coat hanging near the door.

As soon as she had seen this, Fay softly crept to her own room; where she undressed in the dark and was very soon asleep.

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XXXV

A DESPERATE LOVER

AFTER Dolores had scrutinized Devlin from her dark corner of the church steps she knew him, and with her finest mincing air she came down the steps into the fading moonlight.

"How are you, Dolores," he began; "what are you doing here? Do you remember me? I recognized your voice. What has become of your lover, Cristobal, wasn't it? Have you married him?"

"No," said Dolores; and added discreetly, "what are you doing here? You haven't told any one about—about him? Cristobal?"

"No, indeed. He's safe, for me. I came down here to see what they're going to do about the Penitentes."

"I wish they would kill them!" cried Dolores.

"Oh, no! don't say that. What have they done to you?"

"I was up there," she said, nodding her head ominously. "They stole my lover from me. They are going to crucify him. Only, I won't let them. The soldiers won't let them."

"Your lover," he repeated; "Cristobal?"

"No, not him." Dolores shot a flashing glance

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over his shoulder, and he turned to see what she saw. But all he found was the yellowish moon caught in the tree-tops.

"He follows me around," said Dolores, disdainfully, folding her bare arms.

"I thought you promised to marry him."

She gave him a strange, defiant look, and tossed her head. "The Padre told me not to. I am a good Catholic. He is a murderer."

Once more she peered over his shoulder, and then called, "Cristobal! Come here."

Devlin, turning to look again, made out a horse and rider lurking in the shadow.

"Come," repeated the girl.

Slowly the horse approached them.

"Oh, come on," she called tauntingly; "don't be a coward. He won't hurt you; he's not a soldier."

The horseman drew hesitatingly nearer. Devlin would not have known him. Cristobal had let his black beard grow, and it covered half his face. Over his gray store trousers he wore a pair of shaps.

"Don't be scared," the girl continued her mocking encouragement. "The moon is gone. It's dark now. Put away your gun."

It was not yet so dark but that they caught the shimmer of the revolver in his hand.

"The soldiers!" Cristobal exclaimed in Spanish, edging away from them on his horse

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She answered him in English. "There ain't any here now; and anyway they won't hurt you; they don't go for murderers. They told me so."

"Don't say that," said Cristobal vehemently, always in Spanish. "Who is he?" and he pointed to Devlin.

"You remember," she replied; "he's the man who loaned you his horse the day you murdered Anunciato."

She had not finished speaking when Cristobal, digging his spurs into his horse, sprang away from them.

"Oh, come back," called the girl impatiently; "he hasn't told."

A little beyond them in the deeper shadow he drew in his horse, but hesitated.

"I won't hurt you," Devlin assured him.

Again he turned the horse and came towards them cautiously.

"Put up your pistol, or I won't talk to you," commanded Dolores.

Silently he obeyed her.

"Now," she said, laying one hand on his bridle, "what have you come for, anyway?"

Cristobal began blankly in Spanish.

"Speak English," she bade him, with a stamp of her foot.

"Lola! You told me to come," he stammered.

At this Dolores burst into laughter,—a long,

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ringing peal. When she hesitated for breath, she began again.

Cristobal dismounted, and seizing her by the two hands, said: "You will come this time, Lola: you must."

Stopping short in the midst of her laughter, she answered: "I will not, if I don't want to."

"This is his fault," muttered Cristobal angrily, nodding his head toward Devlin.

"Why, I haven't seen her till now."

"It is not," said Dolores. "I don't care about him. Let me go."

She struggled, but the man still held her tightly by the hands.

"Then you have a lover there! Those soldiers," he insisted, falling into Spanish again.

She pulled more fiercely to get from him, speaking brokenly as she twisted with nervous anger to break away. "How can I help it—who loves me. Let me—go! I—hate you!"

She began to sob with anger; she stamped on his foot.

"You told me to come," he gasped, "to come and get you." He was panting as hard as Dolores.

As he dragged her toward his horse, she wailed, "Let me go!" and suddenly spat at him.

Devlin stepped forward.

"Let her go," he said peremptorily.

"Let me go!" shrieked the girl passionately.

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Dropping her hands, Cristobal seized his revolver.

Dolores was rubbing her wrists. "You have hurt me," she panted; "I hate you." Then seeing his stealthy movement: "Be careful. Here comes one of the soldiers!"

Sure enough, in the momentary pause they made at this, they could hear some one coming whistling along the road; and as they glanced to see, Dolores and Devlin recognized Alfred Stange in the half darkness.

Cristobal's hesitation was but for an instant.

"It is your lover," he said in a tone low with fury. "I will kill him."

"There are fifty more," cried Dolores, springing toward him. "They will catch you if you shoot. They will hang you. Hurry. Go!"

He faltered. Then he turned and hastily mounted; and while he called back his farewell tremulous with wrath, "I'll show them. You'll see," his horse had sprung away.

They heard him galloping off, farther and farther.

"Aha! here you are!" came the cheery voice of Stange. "Well, well! What a time you've been having. Your friend seems excited."

He could hear the girl still panting from the shock of the scene she had been through.

"Anything wrong?" Alfie continued.

"No, I don't think anything is just at present,"

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replied Devlin, in a voice rather constrained.

Dolores turned on her heel and started toward the church.

"Dolores, wait a minute," Devlin called after her.

"The Captain just sent me down to see that you weren't plotting against us," explained Stange to him. "That wasn't old Dumain on the fiery charger?"

"No, no! I haven't seen him this evening. That was some affair of this foolish girl's."

"Gad! how many lovers has she?" asked Stange; "and always room for one more! Well, if you—a—when you've bidden her good-night just stroll back our way, will you? Thanks. Sorry to disturb you."

As Stange left him, Devlin hurried after the girl.

"Dolores," he said earnestly, overtaking her at the door of the church. "You must be careful. He might kill you. Don't play with a man that way. He——"

"Ah, he can't do anything," replied Dolores scornfully. "Not that." With a snap of her fingers, she disappeared into the church.

To Houghteling, who still sat on the bench in front of the hotel, smoking his pipe in the starlight, Stange returned with the assurance,

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"He's all right. The game he was in this time wasn't war. He's coming right along."

"What were they doing?" asked the other. "They made a ghastly noise. Was that your friend, Miss Grady?"

"No, that was the wild girl. I didn't quite understand the game. Recriminations of a rancid love affair, I think. She seems to have a good many."

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XXXVI

HE PLOTS WITH WIVVERS

CRAZED with his burning passion and this bitter ending to the love he had cherished so desperately, and with the blind rage he could not spill out spoiling within him till it became a poisonous, cursed thing, Cristobal galloped on wildly, not knowing what road he was taking. Grinding his teeth and cursing inwardly, he would plunge his spurs into the horse, which, already reeking with sweat, tore on madly.

The moon had set; but the vivid congregation of stars shed a pallid light upon the level face of the Valley. Against the black sky there was a tremendous shape of more utter black, directly in front of the horse and rider,—the sleepless shape of Mount Blanca. Cristobal in his ecstacy of anger, never noticed this voiceless sign; and the fagged horse, forced to its final efforts, interminably galloping, galloping on with its eyes on the endless road, never raised them to the mountain. But a sign it was that their mad way lay towards the northwest, towards the village of the Saints.

As they tore along through the huge, arid night with its oppressive silence, scenes arose in

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Cristobal's brain; each clear and distinct, but lasting only an instant, and each chasing the other, as the lights of a railway train flash in succession through the darkness. First was the memory of the little adobe house of Dolores. The shadow of its veranda lay clean and black on the morning sunlight. Anunciato, whom he had murdered, sat by him on the bench. From within came the droning of the Padre and the querulous voice of the dying woman. Dolores flirting a brilliant pictured fan, and with a lace mantilla on her pretty head, strutted, in her bare feet, before them.

Next he saw himself riding in the night,—riding just as he now rode beneath the starlight. He shivered, as it flashed through him that once, some time, he had been riding exactly thus before.

Then he was inside the house, digging in the darkness. The little padre, kneeling before a couple of lighted candles, prayed droningly. He himself dug in the dark; he heard the sand fall lisping from his spade: he shrank against the wall as the edge struck the body of Anunciato, whom he had murdered. Suddenly he was on the hill-slope that leads to San Rafael. He was waiting there in strange garments, and Dolores came out from a house to talk to him,—Dolores with her voice changed and cold, but the same pretty Dolores. And he was about to take her

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away with him on his horse; and then came the little Padre through the night, and drove him away. And he cursed the little Padre and the Penitentes.

And he remembered two laughing soldiers, and a strange man who spoke Spanish and who promised to send soldiers to kill the Penitentes and the Padre.

At this his curses broke out again. The soldiers! The soldiers had come. But before that Dolores had left the Penitentes, and she had sent for him to come and get her. But her head had been turned by the soldiers.

All at once, he was startled by a loud voice in front of him, crying some peremptory word. He drew up his horse almost on its haunches. It stumbled and nearly fell; and then stood trembling under him. Cristobal looked about him. Broad fields of grain swept away on either hand, under the starlight. Before him were the dark hushed houses of a village. The man who had halted him was a great burly creature, with a rifle.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "I thought you were one of them soldiers. What do you want here?"

"I am Cristobal."

"What do you want here? Are you a Saint?"

Cristobal shook his head and made the sign of the cross

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Another tremendous creature appeared, asking the first one who this was.

"Spy, I believe," said the first, "from them soldiers. Better arrest him, Naphtali."

"Spies don't come riding right into you lickety-split," said Wivvers in his rough voice; "and anyway I told you I don't believe them soldiers has come to interfere with us. I guess they're after the Penitentes all right."

Cristobal's sense was returning. "Yes," he put in eagerly. "They go for the Penitentes. I was there. I know."

"You was there?" repeated the first Mormon suspiciously.

"So was we there, Gideon," said Wivvers.

"They got my sweetheart," explained Cristobal. "I hate them."

"Who is your sweetheart?" demanded Wivvers, blackly.

"Dolores. They stole her. I will kill them."

"I'd like to help you," said Wivvers grimly.

Cristobal leaned forward eagerly from his horse. "Yes; we will all go and kill them." He held out his hand to Wivvers.

"That ain't a bad idea," mused Wivvers. "We can meet them up there at San Rafael and interfere with them a little. They wanted us to help 'em so bad. I say we better had. You come along," he said to Cristobal, "and we'll all talk this over."

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So Cristobal, dismounting and leading his horse, went with Wivvers to his house. And there in the bleak parlor their plans were laid in the gray of morning.

About noon the next day Cristobal awoke, and when he remembered where he was his blood boiled anew at the thought of revenge. He proposed to Wivvers that he should go over to Las Animas county to get his own rifle. So strong was his refusal to use any one else's that some of the Mormons again suspected him as a spy. But Wivvers, who somehow felt assured by Cristobal's strenuous intensity, gruffly bade him go, and told him where to meet them the next morning. Nevertheless, they watched him ride off, in the direction indeed of Las Animas, and as long as any one strained his eyes over the glaring yellow distance the way of the horseman was seen to hold the same.

As for Cristobal, he trotted along now in the blaze of day with different visions from those of the night before. The favorite one was of blue-coated soldiers lying in their blood, and the little Padre Maria de Jesus also weltering alongside. And somehow Dolores, with her pretty face, was always running towards him with outstretched arms.

In his accustomed haunts he met with one of his new comrades, and the two, as evening fell,

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sat over their whisky in a dingy bar. Cristobal waxed verbose as to his contemplated deeds of slaughter. As the fumes of their glasses spread thicker, his dark Spanish eyes and his unbridled voice grew more fiery. The evening passed into midnight, filled with the sound of his hatred and his boasting.

At the dawn the two lay still in a drunken torpor; and the day of vengeance came and went before their brains returned.

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XXXVII

FEEDING THE HUNGRY

ONE evening, after a monotonous, smoky meeting, when about twenty Penitentes sat huddled up on the floor praying and droning responses in the house of Oestocris; when finally the spirit had moved some one to rise tacitly, and after bowing to the images to go out, and the others had followed dreamily,—the old mother put her skinny hand on the arm of Fanita. The girl, falling into an inevitably graceful attitude, waited till everyone else had filed out.

"I wanted to speak to you, Neetasta," began the old crone, mysteriously dropping her harsh voice.

After a sharp look into the girl's face, she lowered her eagle eyes.

"Yes," said the girl.

Oestocris pointed one thin arm. "Him. Out there. Paez," she said.

The girl looked at her inquiringly.

"You love him, Neetasta; don't you?" besought the mother.

With eyes large and wondering, Fanita vaguely nodded.

"You were his sweetheart. He always loved

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you. He never would have given you up, except for the love of God."

The corners of Fanita's mouth twitched just a little.

"You,—you want him to succeed," pleaded the mother.

"Oh, Oestocris!" The girl's voice was full of feeling, and she clasped her hands.

"Ah," smiled the old woman sadly, shaking her head. "That will be a proud day for us, the two he cared for most. You will be Saint Veronica and I the Blessed Virgin." The light went out of her eyes and she spoke worriedly again: "But they don't feed him enough out there."

"Why, the Father——" began Fanita.

"He is starving. I can see it. I am his mother. I understand those eyes of his. Oh, he will die before the day, if we don't do something," she pleaded in despair.

The girl looked at her silently.

"It is nearly dark," said Oestocris, peering out into the dusk.

She turned to her wooden chest, and lighted the ill-smelling lamp atop of it.

"Come here," she whispered hoarsely.

Fanita slowly approached.

"Wait!" Oestocris turned and hobbled nervously from the room. In a moment she came shuffling in again, bending over a smoking crockery bowl.

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"Here!" She shoved it towards the girl. "You take this to him."

Fanita drew back. "But the Father forbade anybody to feed him."

"Ha?" queried the old creature. "What! Would you rather have him die before San Rafael's Day?" she demanded.

"Why don't you take it to him yourself, then?"

"Me? I'm scared," confided Oestocris with a sly smile. "I'm his mother, and they'd say—You know. But you're his sweetheart and they'd forgive you. Anyway, nobody'll catch you."

She chuckled and smelled the steam from the bowl.

"Besides, it's meat," objected the girl, sniffing.

"No, no," cried Oestocris. "Not a bit. It's Lenten food. Soup and potatoes. Just what I eat. I'm fasting, you know. Here, take it to him." She put the bowl into Fanita's hands.

"I don't like to," said Fanita, taking it.

"Neetasta," said the old mother reproachfully, "would you have him lose the glory of it? After we've prayed for it so much and the Blessed Virgin sent it to us. Don't you want to be Saint Veronica, and wipe his face? Oh, don't you want him to die on the cross and go right straight to heaven?" There was a tremor in the old cracked voice.

Fanita looked more sympathetically at her.

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"I'll take it," she said. "But I hope he won't eat it."

"Yes, yes," said Oestocris eagerly, pushing her towards the door. "It will do him good. Take it to him."

Holding the bowl carefully and peering about her, Fanita walked gingerly into the darkness. She had not to search long. The fields across the road, where she went first, disclosed him. But she did not see him till she heard his rough breathing. He was leaning in a corner of the fence which partly supported his burden.

"Paez!" she said. "Is this you?"

The answer was an aimless grunt.

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

He said nothing, but she made out that he was nodding in the darkness.

"Here is something to eat, your mother sent you."

She saw the two hands stretched eagerly toward her. But she drew back with the bowl. As she did so, Paez raised one of his extended arms to point into the distance beyond her. She half turned to look. The moon, just appearing over the sturdy shoulder of Mount Blanca, brought out against the softly lighted sky his bold outline in silhouette. Already, even where they stood, the night was a shade less dark.

Paez got one of his hot hands on Fanita's bare forearm and tried to pull it and the bowl to him.

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But again she resisted, saying cheerily, "I am sure that is a sign from the Blessed Virgin to encourage you, the moon coming just now. You don't want to eat, Paez, and break your fast. Doesn't Father Chucho feed you with the Host?"

"I am hungry," he cried in his hoarse, roughened voice.

"Then take it," said she, letting go the bowl; "and I pray that it will give you strength and courage to hold out. And the Blessed Virgin forgive me. I wouldn't have done it, if I hadn't loved you."

Paez was taking no heed of what she said. All doubled over as he was, holding the bowl in the crook of one arm, he was fishing out the food with his other hand, and eating greedily. While she watched him by the rising light of the moon, Fanita prayed. When he had gobbled all, and had even contrived to get his head clear of the cross and to drink the last drop of soup, the girl, holding out her hand, said: "Give me the bowl; and I trust now that God will send you strength to make a good and glorious Christ."

"I am thirsty," growled Paez, and he dragged past her in the direction of the river.

Fanita turned to look after him, sighing; then she shook her head doubtfully, and returned to his mother's house.

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XXXVIII

FAY GOES TOO FAR

AT SIX the next morning, which was Sunday, the day after the Mormons' visit, Fay got up, dressed, and went down into the kitchen. There she found Señorita Tecla before her.

"The Father's too weak to say his mass this morning," Tecla began as soon as her hand-maid came in. "I don't think he can get out of bed. I'm going to ask Father Dumain to say his mass. It's a good thing he's a priest."

"Do I have to go?" asked Fay.

"Why, of course, you do. Don't you always go? Every Sunday?"

"I ain't no Catholic," said Fay sullenly, giving the fire she was making a vicious poke.

"The sooner you become one the better it will be for your soul, Fay Grady. I can tell you that."

Without another answer Fay listened all the while breakfast was preparing to the acrid religious lecture she had called down upon herself.

Mass was at nine o'clock. Except Dumain and a small boy to serve him, the only people in the church were the hired man, Dolores, Pasco,

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Tecla, and Fay Grady. Fay took pains to sit at the other end of their front pew from the Señorita.

They had to themselves a big and not an ugly church. The various shades it was painted in had faded until the gold was dingy and they all blended. The altars, with their lace and their gilt ornaments and their imitation flowers, even though a trifle tawdry, were pretty. The morning sun pouring through one of the painted windows, fell on Fay's hair and made it a lovely unnatural shade of pale purple.

Dumain repeated mass soothingly in his strong, pleasant voice. Its hushed cadences were better than much music. His little congregation, even to Fay, followed the service reverently, looking on their prayer-books, kneeling and standing at the proper times, and again kneeling. The Señorita had her rosary wound round her hand. Above the confidential murmur of the priest's voice, Fay once or twice heard the faint crow of some far-away cock. A warm breeze came in through an open window.

At last came the Elevation. The boy in his mussed white cassock, kneeling on the lowest altar step, sounded his bell. Four heads were bent with reverently closed eyes. But Fay, with head erect, rose, slipped out of the pew, and hurried to the front door, as fast as she could away from the church. Tecla, whose sharp ears heard

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her go, had as much as she could do to restrain herself from looking up during the Elevation.

Fay, once outside, actually ran through the garden, into the house door; and then, slowing a little, through the study into the sacristy. Fortunately the door into the chancel was closed. Dumain's coat hung on a hook. It took her but an instant to get the letter; and in not more than three minutes after that she reached the hotel. She burst into the dining-room, where Houghteling and the Sergeant sat, gasping, "Hurry! Here, read it, and let me take it back, or they will find out. There's only five minutes."

Houghteling snatched the letter.

"Why, it's torn," he exclaimed.

"Father Dumain tore it, himself," said Fay.

"It's in Spanish," he said. "Call Mr. Stange! Why wasn't I a West Pointer?"

Alfie, who was having a bath, appeared in a few seconds with nothing on but his trousers and holding a towel.

"Beg your pardon;" he nodded at Fay.

Fay, not understanding, merely stared.

"My Spanish is pretty rusty," he said, putting the two pieces together and studying the paper.

Fay was gazing at his broad fine body with its smooth skin.

"But it seems to mean about this: 'Brother in God or of God, and some other people. The Lord be with you. You must defer your fes-

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tivity.' I should say they must. 'Cannot be with you personally, but my blessing will be with towards you. Yours and something, P. Emanuelé.' That's the best I can do without a trot. Now, why did Dumain tear it up?"

"Here's another that I seen Father Dumain write himself," drawled Fay.

"The scoundrel," exclaimed Stange. "Let's see it. This one's in Spanish, too, and is signed Dumain: 'The soldiers will not march before six; so you can safely begin about dawn. Father Emanuelé is too sick to write. I send our blessing.'"

"What!" exclaimed Houghteling, amazed.

"And now, Fay my fairy, you run back with it quick. You're a dead game peach and I forgive you."

Fay was out of the room with the letter; her green gown flashed past the windows.

"That girl's hot ice in large cakes," said Alfie approvingly. "I never saw her waked up before."

"I suppose it was best to let her take it back," Houghteling mused.

"Of course. We don't want to get the girl into trouble."

"So he does want them to pull it through," said Houghteling, grimly.

"Aha! Jesuit uncloaked!" cried Stange.

"Would you march at once?"

"I'd march at midnight," said Alfie, starting

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back to his bath. "It's cool then, and plenty of time. In the meanwhile I'd surround that parsonage and not let another soul out."

Fay, while this conversation was going on, had returned almost as quickly as she had gone. Putting the letter back into the pocket of the coat in the sacristy, she went into the garden and sat down in the shade on the front steps. The church bell left off ringing; so she knew that mass was nearly over. As she sat there panting from her run, she heard voices inside the house. She moved to one side so as not to be seen from within and continued sitting quietly

After she had been there for what seemed a good while, with the smell of the trees in her nostrils, a horse came round from the side of the house, and passing the garden, trotted down the road in the sunlight. She recognized Pasco on it; but he didn't see her.

Pasco had been given the letter and had been sped away from the back door by his hostess and Dumain. After he was out of sight round the corner of the house, Tecla began: "I can't think where that girl can be. It's shameful, such a thing occurring in one's own house. I don't know how to apologize——"

"Don't try to," said Dumain gallantly. "I know it was not at all your fault. But you are

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going to punish the girl in some way for her own——"

"Indeed I shall. What can I do to her?"

"I should advise locking her in her room. With soldiers in the Valley,——"

"I'll go look for her again. Shameless creature!"

She hurried from the kitchen, and as she went first to look in the garden, she soon found the culprit sitting complacently on the front steps.

"What did you mean by leaving the church, Fay Grady, in the middle of mass?"

"I was tired of the mass," said Fay calmly.

"Don't answer me!" cried Tecla, furious. "You are a heathen, and I'm ashamed to have you in my house, good-for-nothing, deceitful girl! I know what I'll do with you. Go to your room at once; do you hear me?"

Fay quietly got up to go.

"I told you not to go out again without my permission. You're a disgrace to me. You must have meant some mischief—I'm sure those soldiers—There's one of them now!" cried the indignant Señorita, catching sight of Stange sauntering along the road smoking. "Get up stairs! Ugh, I wish I was rid of you."

Fay slowly went up to her room. Tecla, nervously following, ran into her own room, got her great bunch of keys, and locked the girl's door on the outside. Then she flounced away

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again and with the utmost difficulty began moving a heavy chest of drawers down the hall with which to bar the prison door, panting with fatigue and anger over her task.

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XXXIX

AN INEFFECTIVE SIEGE

AS SOON as Stange reported the messenger's departure, the blockade of the priest's house was begun.

Tecla, who was cooking dinner, was so alarmed at the posting of a guard outside her kitchen window that, when he had conciliatorily but firmly refused to obey her nervous command to go away, she ran tremblingly upstairs and hysterically besought Dumain's help. He, calming and reassuring her, bade her not to alarm her brother needlessly about it. "It would only make him worse," said he; "and I'm sure there's no danger. The best thing for you to do," he continued kindly, "is to stop crying, like a brave Christian woman, and go get his dinner. You must control yourself and trust in the Lord and the Blessed Virgin."

Tecla wiped her eyes with her apron.

"Will you?" He took her cold hand in a priestly clasp.

"I will try," she said brokenly.

"No, promise me," he insisted.

"I promise," she said with a gulp. "But, oh! I am so tried to-day."

"Say your beads and you will forget it. Now go, and don't think about all this."

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Tecla halted on the threshold and said tragically. "Oh, those poor Penitentes! What will they do with them, if they treat us like this?"

"That's what puzzles me," said Dumain.

"Write and tell them to stop," she pleaded.

"Why, so your brother has. You saw the letter: 'By no means continue your ceremony.'"

"Yes," she said sniffling; "so I did. I am so upset."

Still hysterically sobbing and choking, she descended to the kitchen.

Dumain went down to the front door and asked the soldier there where he could find one of the officers.

"The Captain and the Lieutenant's at the hotel. But you can't go out. The Sergeant's at a little door round behind the church. Will I call him?"

Dumain, saying he would go to him, went in and found a passageway with a little door at the end, which he opened; and there was the Sergeant, who saluted.

"You will assure me, I suppose," said Dumain, "that no harm is intended us so long as we stay quietly indoors."

"Certainly, sir."

"What time do you think the Captain proposes——"

"Special orders to answer none of your questions, sir," interrupted the Sergeant stiffly. "The

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Captain will be here after a while if you want him."

"Oh, I see," nodded Dumain.

He went in, and repeated the Sergeant's assurance to Tecla.

Fay Grady had taken her imprisonment philosophically. At first, she had indeed pounded a few times on the door with her fist, but when she heard the heavy furniture being moved, she had resigned herself to her fate and gone complacently to the window. Her room was over the little door, where Dumain interviewed the Sergeant. The back of the church and one large tree cut off the view, and both were too far away for climbing down.

After looking out for a short while, she had lain down on her bed; and despite its being broad daylight, was soon asleep. She slept soundly all afternoon.

Houghteling and Stange spent most of that Sunday afternoon in the hotel bar. On the map they studied the lay of the land, which is all pretty flat in the San Luis Valley, though towards San Rafael there is more of a roll. Wezel, who had lived for many years at Antonito, was able to help them a good deal. They planned their march as carefully as possible. Now that they had intercepted Dumain's message, they were to start at midnight; and they calculated that it would take at least three hours.

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At four o'clock they heard the down train pass without stopping.

At five, when the relief was posted at the parsonage, Houghteling went over with them. Dumain appeared at the church door and spoke to him.

"How are you?" said the Captain gravely.

"I suppose you do not wish me to come out."

"That was my idea," said Houghteling, still gravely.

"I'm sorry," said Dumain, "that you refuse to have more confidence in me: but that shall not prevent my giving you another piece of information, which may be useful. I find the Penitentes are not, after all, going to abandon their ceremony, but merely to begin earlier. The ceremony will probably be at four to-morrow morning; so I should advise your setting out for there about midnight. I trust you will be successful."

"I thank you," said Houghteling, formally, but he could not conceal the surprise in his eyes.

Dumain disappeared into the church.

When Houghteling reached the hotel again, he said to Stange: "I can't understand that man. What do you think he told me? That we'd better march at midnight."

Alfie laughed heartily.

"What a boy he is!" said he. "He probably had discovered that we intercepted his letter.

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That's what it is to be a diplomat. You'll never be one, Dan. I might."

"No, I don't believe he knew," considered Houghteling. "He didn't act like it. But I'm more at a loss than ever to know his game. I shouldn't be surprised at anything unexpected. We'll keep him in there till it's all over."

"You bet we will," agreed Stange.

Houghteling turned and went into the hotel.

A minute or two later, while Stange was still standing there whistling to himself, a man came hurriedly riding, and drew up. He recognized one of the Mormons who had been with Wivvers. Instinctively his hand went to his holster. But the Mormon, without a word, handed him a letter and rode off as fast as he had come.

As the letter had no address, Alfie tore it open.

"Dan!" he was shouting the next minute at the foot of the stairs, "come down! Here's more news. Those Mormons are coming," he cried as Houghteling reappeared.

The Captain read the letter, which was written in a large, scrawly, careful hand, as follows:

"We are going to join you against the San Rafaelers after all. We don't want no quarrel with you and they ought to be put down. Agree with thine adversary quickly, says the holy scriptures. We will meet you to-morrow morning early. Yours, etc.

"Naphtali Wivvers, Elder."

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"Where's the man that brought it?" asked Houghteling.

"He rode away like hell."

"Why did you let him? We'll have to write now and tell them to stay away."

"What for?" said Stange. "They won't do any harm."

"Harm! Didn't they go off swearing vengeance? Trust an insulted savage."

"I'd just as soon trust them," says Alfie, nonchalantly.

"You know what I put up with to get clear of them. It's about a woman, too."

"Anyway, they'll never think of going so early," argued Alfie.

"For all we know Dumain may have told them."

"Gad! Do you think he's in this, too?"

"He called them in first," said Houghteling.

"He's a corker!" laughed Alfie.

"Get a horse saddled, while I write a note, will you?"

Houghteling went into the bar and wrote this laconic note:

"You needn't come. I told you to remain quiet. Houghteling,
"Captain Commanding."

He addressed it to Naphtali Wivvers.

The soldier who took it was bidden to follow the Mormon at full speed; and if he didn't catch

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him at a house two miles down the road, to inquire the way and ride straight to Manassa. He spurred his horse, which sprang forward; and soon they were only a cloud of sand glimmering far down the road.

When late in the evening, he returned tired and dusty, with a wet horse, he reported that only a few miles from Manassa he had overtaken the Mormon, who took the note without a word.

Darkness fell quickly. The moon seemed brighter and bigger than usual,—rather puffy,—and there were few stars. Occasionally a dog was heard barking and once a horse neighed; but Stange noticed that there were no crickets. At nine he went over with the relief guard. While he was standing at the little back door in the corner of the church and the house, talking with the Sergeant, he heard a voice above him cautiously calling his name.

The tree threw a shadow where they stood.

"Is that you?" said the voice.

Alfie paused and looked up. There in the moonlight was Fay Grady's head out of a window.

"Fay! Yes, it's I. What do you want?"

"I want to get down," said Fay lapsing into her natural slow speech.

"Well, come on down, and I'll let you out this door. Hurry up."

"I can't," explained Fay. "I'm locked in."

"Who locked you in?"

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"She did," Fay drawled, "'cause I left the church in mass."

"Why, what a bloody autocrat! I'll get you down. If I only had a ladder."

"There's one in the church that they mend the bells with. Inside the door, on the left."

Stange bade one of the men fetch it.

"How did you happen to be down there?" inquired Fay from above.

"Why, we're besieging the house; didn't you know? No one is allowed to come out."

"I thought it was something like that," giggled the girl, "'cause I heard the soldiers. I've been asleep most of the time. How mad she must be! Serves her right, cross old thing."

The man returned carrying the ladder. They hoisted it up and Fay began to clamber out the window.

"Wait," called Stange, who could see her in the moonlight.

He started up.

"I can get down all right," she said.

"Wait for me," he insisted. "Now you can come," he said, when he had got to the top, and looked past her into the moon-lighted room. "Have you got your nightgown?"

"No," said Fay, going back for it.

"You'd better."

"Yes," she agreed, as she cautiously turned on the window-sill; "I'll never go back in that house

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no more. They starve you, too," she went on, as he helped her down round by round, with his arm about her. "I ain't had nothin' to eat all day. I got some water out of the pitcher."

"What brutes!" said Alfie feelingly. "But we'll fool 'em. She'll be surprised."

Fay laughed. It was a nervous, unpracticed laugh.

"Wait for me in the garden," he bade Fay.

When the relief was posted, and the soldiers coming off had gone to the hotel, he found her waiting inside the gate. They walked slowly back. He carried her bundle and put one arm round the plump waist. Her head came just above his shoulder. Only once, where the porch of the post office made a shadow in the moonlight, did he pause and bend down to kiss her. He proposed to stop and sit there on the steps, but Fay couldn't see the use; and, besides, she was hungry. So they strolled on.

He brought her into the room, where were Houghteling and Wezel and the six men just relieved. The soldiers all stood to one side, and stared at the buxom young figure in bright green.

"Good evening!" Houghteling greeted her. "I hear you've been rescued."

"What she wants is food," cried Alfie. "Get her some bread and ham, old Wezel, and some beer."

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Fay ate, oblivious of all else.

"I thought I told you," said Houghteling in a low tone, standing in front of Stange, who sat at the table, "that no one was to leave that house without my written order."

"Oh, I forgot that," said Alfie. "But it's all right. Fay here——"

"But the men knew it," said Houghteling, still black.

"I forgot to tell them, old man," laughed Alfie, putting his hands on Houghteling's shoulders.

The Captain looked relieved.

"That's better for discipline. But you'll never make a soldier, Alfred."

"While Danny here, who rose from the ranks, will go up, *so* high—till he's a Major-General. Well, I hope so."

"You'd better go to bed now and get a couple of hour's sleep before we march. I am."

"I'm not."

"You're not? Why?"

"I want to talk to her." He jerked his head towards Fay behind him.

"You mean to say you'd lose your wink of sleep before a hot march, for that?"

"Yes, for that," retorted Alfie, defiant. "I've never had a good chance to talk to her yet."

Houghteling turned away with a shrug.

"You men, turn in," he commanded, and left the room.

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Alfie, swinging his legs and smiling, waited till they all had gone out, and Wezel after them.

Fay had taken no notice of anything but her supper. He turned towards her. "It's good to be free to go where you want, isn't it?"

She looked up at him with her gray eyes.

"I reckon I'll go over to Manassa," she said.

"Not tonight."

"Yes. I guess so."

"Oh, I wouldn't," said Alfie.

"Why not?"

"I want to talk to you. I want you to tell me—— You can sleep here. We're going away to-morrow."

"Are you?" said Fay, disinterestedly.

"Yes, we are. Aren't you sorry?"

She looked at him awhile with rather a puzzled expression.

"Oh, yes," she said finally.

He laughed dryly.

"Have you ever been out of the Valley, Fay?" He reclined on the table, leaning his head on his hand so that it was on a level with hers.

Fay leaned back in her chair.

"I was seven when I came here," she drawled, blinking her eyes.

"Oh, of course. From Georgia. Don't you ever feel as if you'd like to go out again? Up to Denver, or anywhere?"

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"Sometimes," said Fay, slowly. "I don't know."

"Do you think you'll marry Wivvers?" he asked softly.

"Yes, I reckon I will now."

She twisted from her placid position and stretched her shoulders.

"You think——"

Fay now fairly yawned, and he paused.

"Ah," she said yawning; "I guess I'll go to bed."

"Oh, no," coaxed Alfie, "stay and talk with me."

"I'm so sleepy," said Fay, rubbing her hands over her face, and yawning again.

Alfie laughed once more, pulled himself together, got off the table, and yelled for Wezel.

"I'll get him to fix up my room for you," he said. "And you be sure to wait till we get back tomorrow."

As for Dolores, Tecla had gone to her room Sunday morning and had taken her down for breakfast and mass. She had not noticed that the door of the room was already unlocked when she turned the key in it. The girl was obstinately silent. Pasco gazed at her in amazement; but she only returned one withering stare, and then would not see him. After mass Tecla was too much excited over Fay Grady to think of

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her other charge; but when she did remember her, she found the girl quiet in her room. By this time the house was surrounded by soldiers, and Dolores was so docile that Tecla did not think it needful to lock her in again. She found that the girl went to her own room after each meal and stayed there; and when Tecla went to bed, Dolores was apparently sleeping.

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XL

THE VIGIL

THE vigil of San Rafael's Day was a strangely silent night in the Penitentes village,—very strangely silent, for there was not a moan, not a sigh to be heard from the dim houses: nothing but the slight stinging sounds of whips on bare flesh,—sounds almost like kisses. All the men were indoors, in their own houses performing this last preparatory rite of flagellation,—a final mortification of the flesh to purify them for the supreme sacrifice of the morrow. Hour after hour it continued; the hissing sounds sometimes ceasing for a while in one house or another, but never in all of them. The dusk gathered into darkness and the moon set behind the eastern mountains. In the open space of the village not a soul was to be seen, till all at once Fanita came hurrying aimlessly along,—hurrying and then pausing. She held both hands over her eyes, and then again over her ears.

Wandering at first from her own house, straight out into the open, at last she changed her course, and finally went running in at the open door of the house of Oestocris. The old woman, sitting alone in the wan lamp-light, rock-

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ing to and fro as she mumbled prayer upon prayer, raised her head and was silent as the girl came hurrying in.

"Oestocris!" cried Fanita, with a little groan. "Isn't it horrible?"

Dropping to her knees, she again laid her two hands over her ears.

Oestocris glared at her with her sharp eyes, but she spoke kindly.

"What is it, daughter?"

"I can hear it yet," moaned the girl. "The whip on my father's back,—biting, biting. His back is all red, with long welts down it. And the drops of blood drop on the floor. And it never stops." She shuddered.

"You should have been praying, Neetasta, and not thinking of such things. In every house our men are flagellating themselves; your father is not the only one. It is the will of God. He does not feel it, for his mind is too full of his holy purpose."

"It is awful, awful!" sighed the girl. "I can't bear to see it."

"I am surprised you are so weak," said Oestocris, severely. "I should be willing to do it myself. Remember the stripes and the blood are for the glory of God. He suffered so, Himself."

Fanita sadly shook her head.

"Think of the glorious morning. Think of Paez. Be strong. Be strong as he is."

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"He doesn't have to lash himself," said Fanita.

"He is to be crucified."

"I know, I know; but that is different. That is glorious."

"That is hard, too," said the old woman; "unless you are filled with the love of God."

"Anyway, Paez is not so strong," objected the girl in self-defence. "He is frightened as well as I am."

"Neetasta!" the harsh old voice rang with reproach.

Fanita made no answer.

After a few moments Oestocris, stiffly clambering to her feet, held out her hand to the girl.

"Come," she said. "We will go and see how he is. We will say good-bye to him. To-morrow it would not be proper."

Fanita hung back. "The Father will see us."

"No one will see us," said Oestocris, seizing the girl's hand and dragging her along. "They are all indoors. Listen!"

As they stole along, clinging together, the night was alive with the monotonous hiss of the scourges. They hurried silently from the village, and up to the swell of the hills. There, as they moved slowly, peering about for some sign of their cross-bearer in the gloom, suddenly there was a dull cry at their very feet. They both shrank back.

"Paez!" exclaimed his mother.

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"You have stepped on him," breathed Fanita, horror-stricken.

Kneeling among the low-growing bushes, where he lay fallen, they felt for him blindly.

"Paez!" implored Oestocris. "Where are you? Did I hurt you?"

After awhile the answer came in the hoarse lifeless voice: "I don't know. I can't feel what hurts me now."

His voice almost died away as he spoke, flickering with his breath.

"Paez, you are not dying?" Oestocris, putting out one bony hand, felt for his face, and then smoothed back the matted hair from his forehead.

"No, no," he answered. "I am strong. I can carry the cross. I am not even hungry any more."

He spoke so falteringly that they waited to see if more was coming.

"Are you frightened?" asked Fanita, in her clear young voice.

"Who is that?" he asked quickly, moving his head under his mother's hand. "Nita!" There was a tone of disheartenment in his voice. "I thought it was Dolores come back."

"To-morrow is the day," said Fanita. "Did you know?"

This time they hardly thought the answer was coming at all.

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"So much the better," he said calmly.

"Are you frightened?" asked his mother.

"No!" He spoke with an unnatural calmness. "The angels come and talk to me, and tell me about heaven. And then I shall have no cross to carry."

"It is beautiful in heaven!" said Oestocris, rapturously.

"Yes," he answered in the same dull tone. "Yes. There is nothing to hurt you there. Only if I had gone with Dolores, I should not want to go to heaven so soon. We should have gone off way over there, out of the Valley, and never come back. It is different over there. We would have been married, Dolores and me, and we would have lived there in our house, with a ranch, and horses, and lots of cattle, and fields, and horses, and Dolores,—Dolores and me. She wanted me to go, and I wish I had gone. She loved me and I loved her; and they took me and put me on this cross, and it is killing me."

"Paez!" Fanita's voice hurled out her pent-up feelings.

He paused, and then resumed again: "Dolores said it was killing me; and I would have gone away with her, and never wanted to go to heaven; and I wish I had now. Because she loved me."

Suddenly his words ceased in a vague mum-

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bling. His mother had laid her hand over his mouth.

"Pray—Paez—pray!" she said in his ear. "Pray to the Virgin."

"He is crazy," she said to Fanita.

Paez lay quite still till she took her hand off his mouth, and then he began to pray aloud: "Hail Mary, full of grace——" He said the words mechanically, over and over and over again,—only sometimes he said "Dolores."

After some minutes, Fanita took him by the shoulder and shook him. "Stop!" she cried; "stop!"

"Sh! Nita," said the old mother fiercely. "He is praying. Don't say stop."

Still he continued the prayer.

"Come," said Oestocris, with a sigh; "we will go back."

So they left him lying there tied to the cross, praying among the low-growing bushes.

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XLI

THE FIGHT AT THE CHURCH

AS Father Maria de Jesus had told the Jesuit priest Dumain, on the day that the two soldiers came to San Rafael with the order to the Penitentes for them to abandon their ceremony, he hardly thought that at this late day he could prevent it from taking place; and, moreover, he said confidentially, he should not need to, since he could simply have it earlier in the day than they had intended. However, he had consented, on Dumain's suggestion, to wait for a letter of advice from the sick Father Emanuelé, who was a great friend of his, and with whom he had gone down into the Valley once or twice to talk over the festival.

Of all this he did not speak even to Oestocris and Cristoké; and the next day when Pasco, whom he had sent to Antonito with Dumain, brought a letter telling him to proceed with the ceremony without fear, he no longer had any dread whatever of interruption.

In Antonito, however, there had not been the least intention on the part of any one to allow the ceremony to proceed. Captain Houghteling had made all his preparations to prevent it; and ac-

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cordingly, a few minutes after midnight, when San Rafael's Day had just begun, he drew up all his men, except the small guard left at the priest's house, and the march on San Rafael began. The moon had set; the stars twinkled coldly in an almost blue sky; the air was fresh and cool. As they marched, in rout step, no sound was to be heard except the continuous chunking of the men's feet in the sand and the snorting of the two horses. Everybody was silent, except when occasionally one of the soldiers spoke in low tones to his neighbor.

At the brook below the rise, which cut the hamlet off from them, they made their second halt, and drank and rested. Houghteling sent two men forward to reconnoiter. These having soon returned and reported nobody stirring, were sent on again to give notice when any one should stir.

The others waited there a long time in silence.

"They must have overslept," said Stange, in subdued tones, looking at his watch.

Dolores, who slept with one eye open, was aroused by the shuffling sound of the soldiers' footsteps, as they marched past the church toward San Rafael. Jumping up and leaning out her open window, she called anxiously after them. Hearing no reply from the shadows, she called louder. This time she was answered by

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a voice from below her in the darkness saying: "Be still. You can't get out."

She peered down, but there was no one to be seen.

Hurrying stealthily to her door, through the passage way, and down the stairs, she cautiously opened the front door. Before she could fix the figure standing there, she was accosted shortly: "Halt! Who is there?"

"I am," said Dolores, shutting the door behind her."

"Well, go back again. No one can come out."

Though she could just barely see him, his voice sounded very close.

"No, no: let me out. I want to go with them, —to San Rafael."

"Orders to let no one out. If you stay, I'll call the Corporal of the guard."

"No!" pleaded Dolores; "don't call any one. I can't go back. The door is shut. Let me go."

The guard began to call: "Post —," but she put her hand over his mouth.

Thinking she was trying to slip past, he caught hold of her. At this Dolores threw her arms about his neck and drew him down to her. "Don't call," she coaxed; "it's only me, Dolores. No, be good to me."

He put up his hand to unloose hers. "We will be going soon, and then you can all come out," he said, weakening.

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"How soon?"

"In an hour or two."

"Oh, that won't do. I won't get there in time," she begged. "See, now, let me go," and with that she impetuously kissed him. "I know you will be good to me."

"Well——," he began, still weakening. Then with a change of tone: "Here comes the Corporal."

Sure enough, Dolores heard some one and caught sight of a lantern coming round a corner. Like a flash, she had released him, opened the door and was inside.

Disconsolately she started up the steps again. She felt the tears run down her face. The idea of Fay Grady flashed into her mind. She had told her a way out before. Wiping her tears on her bare arm, Dolores turned to Fay's room. To her surprise she found a heavy chest before the door. In this she recognized Tecla's work, and realizing that Fay might herself be anxious enough to escape, she set to work to push it away. It was so heavy that it grated on the floor with what seemed a terrific shriek. But in the pause she made, Dolores heard no movement. Reaching the door, she found no key in it.

Again an expedient flashed upon her. She hastened to her own door, and brought that key. It fitted. Pushing the door open and closing it

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most softly, Dolores called Fay in a low voice. No answer. She felt for the bed. It was empty. She groped her way to the open window, and leaned out. She found herself between two pieces of wood sticking above the sill. Of a sudden these resolved themselves into the end of a ladder. The way was clear.

Before descending, Dolores studied the lay of the land. Below her at some distance from the ladder sat the Corporal with his lantern by him. Though he was motionless, she could not be sure that he slept. However, the lantern was far enough from the ladder not to include it in its circle of light. Dolores decided to risk it.

Holding her breath, she silently clambered out on the ladder, and down. She kept an eye on the Corporal; but he didn't see her. Once on the ground, she crept several paces, and then fairly ran. She took the road towards the southwest. Through the heavy sand, she ran along persistently. It was so dark that she could not see where she was going; but she knew the road well, and by the feeling under foot could keep in it. Away from the town, out into the open Valley, she ran on and on. Now and again halting for breath, she stood with her hand over her heart, gasping. Then freshened by her irresistible desire, she started on again. Once, hearing the murmur of an artesian well, she stopped to drink from it, and would have thrown herself

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down from sheer fatigue; but becoming aware of a dark object across the road, she knew that it was her old home, where her sister had died, where Cristobal had murdered Anunciato; and, spurred by the vision of that desolate house, she ran on again with new vigor. Always on and on blindly, the sand made her going hard. Occasionally she stumbled in its depth, which clogged her feet. But as yet she had come upon no sign of the soldiers; and remembering this gave her new desperation to press forward.

At last, panting with exhaustion, she found that she began to distinguish objects as she passed them. It was beginning to grow a shade less dark. In the wanness she made out the form of a tree. Then she slackened her fierce pace a little, for she knew she was drawing nearer to the rise of the hills. This very thought that she had the shorter part of the way yet to go, once more spurred her on. And though her legs were heavy and her shoulders ached with fatigue, she forced herself to keep up a mechanical running. The pale dawn strengthened. She could see the hills vague beyond her. The road began to slope upwards and she could not go so fast. At last she had to stop and merely walk for half a mile. Then the revived fever of her excitement pushed her on again.

Now she could see the little grove of trees that she knew bordered the river below San Rafael.

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They stood huddled together, strange in the gray light before sunrise. Then she heard the angry beat of hoofs, one-*two*, one-*two*. She turned her head to look; on they came behind her. No; it was not the soldiers. Without seeing who it was, she made her last great effort, and as they went up the slope, kept still ahead of them.

The Penitentes had by no means overslept. On the contrary, every one of them had been up long before dawn that morning. There was much to be done. Father Maria de Jesus had to go round personally among his excited people to see that all the paraphernalia were ready. The crown of thorns, contrived from strips of prickly pear, he found on hand; and Fanita never let go of the piece of unbleached cotton that figured Saint Veronica's napkin. But it was discovered that though large nails were abundant, nobody had thought of a hammer. As for a sponge, there was not such a thing in San Rafael; but finally Panchita was able to find a piece of cotton-batting that would answer.

All this took some time. So it was almost daybreak when the procession formed to go to the church. Cristoké, who, despite his age, was decided on for Saint John, went first with Oestocris; then Panchita as Mary Magdalene and Fanita with her napkin; then came those who

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presented Nicodemus and the Other Mary, Joseph of Arimathaea, and Simon the Cyrenian. The Apostles followed. More pains had been taken to give everybody a part than to be historically accurate.

All the Penitentes wore their ordinary dirty white and blue clothes; the women their little round caps. The men, who were bareheaded, had long black hair. All the faces wore a very serious expression of piety even more marked than commonly.

This procession wended its way slowly and gravely to the church. Paez, with the cross, waited, crouching outside; but the others filing in, took their places. The priest, coming last, carefully drew the curtain before the door of the church. The young acolyte in his scarlet and carrying the crown of thorns passed up the aisle, followed by Father Maria de Jesus in a white and gold chasuble, bearing a lighted taper. They proceeded to the altar, where the nails and hammer and the sponge were already set forth.

The Father placed his taper in a candlestick, and while the acolyte stood near him with the censer, from which curled little thin clouds of perfume, ready to cense each of the implements, he began to bless them in turn and to consecrate them to their holy use.

This ceremony finished, Father Maria de Jesus

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lighted the three rows of candles on the altar, and began mass.

It was after this that the soldiers arrived, and not knowing that the Penitentes were already in the church, waited for them to appear. While they waited, the gray dawn began to glow, with a vague smell of freshness. One yellowish star died very hard; then, suddenly with a flush of pink, came the sun, over Blanca at their backs. As he rose there was a wide view disclosed behind them, back over the glaring golden waste of sand with its elusive distances.

In ten minutes it was hot.

"We might as well go up and occupy the place," began Houghteling; "they must be awake."

He was about to give an order when Alfie, who had been sweeping the Valley with a field glass to find the guard, who were to have followed them, exclaimed: "Wait a minute. There's somebody coming!"

Houghteling, turning, shaded his eyes with his hat, and letting his reins hang loose, gazed in the direction the other pointed.

"By George! It's the Mormons," cried Stange. "Yes, sir! There's old Wivvers."

"We'll go up before they get here," said the other, "and give them a bugle-call and order them to remain peaceably in their houses."

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"Read the riot act," agreed Alfie; "and then give the Saints what for, when they come, for coming."

The little detachment moved forward.

Just then the church bell began to toll.

"Why, they've begun!" exclaimed Alfie. "It's queer the scouts didn't see them."

"I see why," said Houghteling. "The church has no windows, and they've got a curtain at the door."

"They've been at mass all this time. That bell means it's nearly over."

As they drew near, they saw crouching in front of the little square church a brown thing, part of which seemed to be a wooden cross.

"What's that?" Houghteling asked, pointing with his sword.

"That's the man," said Alfie with unconscious blasphemy. "He's the one to be crucified. Nit."

Houghteling motioned to the bugler. "Blow —Assembly," he ordered.

At the first brazen sounds, the curtain was drawn and the congregation could be seen turning hurriedly round.

"Remember," cried Houghteling, rising in his stirrups, "don't shoot! If they resist, arrest them."

As the men in blue crossed the sand at double-quick, the wretched, brown figure of Paez under the cross, rose upright. Starved and worn and

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dazed as he was, with a sudden accession of strength he somehow burst the ropes that tied him to the cross, got it off his back and into his arms, and in a supreme effort raised it over his head by the beam, and aimed it at the advancing line of soldiers. During the moment the great beam hung lifted in the air, Alfie caught a sudden sight of the man's wild, tortured, transfigured face, with eyes all whites, and heard him cry, "Jesus!" The next moment he spurred his horse, waving his sword. The last soldier passed an instant before the cross dropped ponderously with the tremendous power of its own weight, and the deathly silent figure in brown fell and lay limp upon it, his arms outstretched.

A desperate long heart-tearing shriek, and from behind the soldiers a girl came running headlong through the crush of men, and dropped on the motionless body and sobbed and kissed the face.

Alfie, who had reined in his horse, was pale and sick at all this; but he found voice to murmur, "Dolores."

The next moment a girl in a red waist pushed out from among the Penitentes, and ran towards the group, but one of the soldiers, struck by the murderous look of hatred in her face, caught her, just as Houghteling cried to him: "Seize that woman!"

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In their first surprise at the sound of the bugle, coming suddenly in the midst of the Elevation and drowning the tinkling of the altar bell, the Penitentes had hurriedly risen from their knees and turned to see, as the curtain was quickly drawn back, the blue soldiers,—scores of them there seemed,—with guns in their hands, running noiselessly across the sand towards the church. They had stood, dumfounded, dazed with astonishment and horror, drawing back a little upon one another as the soldiers got nearer. But after they had seen Paez fall, and seen Fanita shoot out from among them,—with a sudden impulse, they had pushed out furiously behind her, ferociously wild-eyed.

Alfie seeing them come, put spur to his horse, and made toward them; and at this moment, in the midst of a sudden trampling of horses behind him, a shot rang out. The Mormons had come. The thought flashed through Alfie's mind as his right arm dropped dangling at his side, and his sword fell to the ground. Before Houghteling, who was beside him, had time to turn in his saddle and to draw his revolver, Alfie having seized his own with his left hand, turned, and catching sight of Wivvers who had drawn up his horse behind them, fired. Wivvers reeled in his saddle, and as his pistol went off again, tumbled headlong.

The eight other Mormons, whose fingers were

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on their triggers, fired a wild volley and then wheeled and galloped off. Houghteling did not shoot after them. Alfie was feeling his arm and trying not to faint. He suddenly had to grab hold of his saddle to steady himself.

Meanwhile the Penitentes,—kicking, striking blindly with their fists, and even biting,—struggled and fought with the soldiers, who during the Mormon episode had their hands full; till on hearing Alfie's shot and seeing Wivvers fall, the fight seemed all at once to leave the Penitentes, and, believing from Dolores's sobs that their Christ was dead, they huddled together and made but slight resistance more. Houghteling, when he saw that Wivvers lay still, called to the soldiers: "All right. Take them all!"

"I ain't all right," said Alfie, who had slipped off and was leaning against his horse, trying to laugh.

Father Chucho, who had torn off his chasuble and his cassock and left them lying on the chancel floor,—running out after all the others, resisted so fiercely that he felled one soldier by a blow on the brow; and it took four more to hold the little man. When he saw that it was of no avail to fight, he stood still enough; but speaking in Spanish to his cowed flock about him, and specially to the muttering women who kneeled beside Paez fallen on his cross,—he ex-

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horted them to be of good cheer, for the end was not yet come!

The others were surrounded and tied together by the soldiers, while Houghteling had the church searched. The crown of cactus thorns, nails, and a hammer were found on the altar.

"That looks serious," said Houghteling. "We shall have to take them with us." And riding up to Father Maria de Jesus, he saluted and said: "Father, I fear my orders will require me to take you and all of your men-folk to Denver with me."

"And leave these poor stricken women alone," exclaimed the Father, horrified, waving his head towards the frightened group huddled about old Oestocris where she kneeled by the side of her son, tearless and dazed.

However, resistance was again of no avail.

The priest translated the Captain's command into Spanish. There was a moment of silence. Then, the sobs of the women breaking out freely, they clung passionately to their sons and husbands.

Dolores still lay on the body on the cross.

Father Chucho was whispering encouragement, when he was interrupted by the Captain's saying, kindly but uncompromisingly: "We have no time to spare. I trust you will get your men together, Father; for I shall not order them to

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be dragged from their wives, except as a last necessity."

"God forbid!" said the Father, and at once spoke to them in Spanish.

The men, obedient as always, separated from their wives and mothers, to whom Father Maria de Jesus spoke a last word: "Be good, my children, while I am away. Forgive your enemies; pray for us. Do not forget to comfort the mother of our dead who died in the Lord. I will have father Emanuelé send some one up to bury him. And I will pray to God and trust Him to keep you and care for you till He permits us to come again. May He bless you!"

With outstretched hand and tearful eyes he murmured his benediction upon the women and upon San Rafael.

The last thing Stange saw as he looked back was Dolores sitting on the sand with the head of Paez in her lap, her head bent down over him.

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XLII

FAY'S FUTURE

DURING the last minutes of Houghteling's interview with Father Maria de Jesus, Peter Wezel had arrived at San Rafael bringing Dumain and Devlin with him in his mule wagon. The soldiers who had been left to keep up the siege of the priest's house were also with them.

Father Maria de Jesus, Cristoké, and some others of the older men among the prisoners were put into the wagon to ride to Antonito. The others marched between two lines of soldiers.

As the cavalcade was starting Dumain said to Houghteling, smiling: "I see you have succeeded admirably. Now don't you think my way was the best,—as proved by results?"

Houghteling did not answer him; but the Jesuit pursued complaisantly: "However, I noticed you've had to kill one man. I'm glad I wasn't here to see that."

"He interfered with us," said Houghteling, shortly, turning away again to give an order.

Dumain gave him a grim though rather amused smile, and said no more.

At the stream, he offered to bandage Stange's arm. Alfie willingly consented.

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"And perhaps you will tell me," he said coaxingly, while the operation was doing, "what game you've been trying to work all along."

Dumain smiled and looked over at Mount Blanca on the distant horizon.

"You see," he explained rather impersonally, "my superiors thought Captain Houghteling ought not to get to San Rafael too soon, but that he ought to get there just soon enough."

"Ow, that hurts!" cried Alfie as the other squeezed his arm.

And he asked no further questions.

Devlin, however, found a chance to say to the Jesuit: "Father, I can see how the result of this has all been due to you."

Dumain smiled. "I thank you," he said; "but God has given us all parts to play in this world."

They arrived at the hotel in time and to spare for the three o'clock train.

"I guess Wivvers is sorry now he didn't go to Cripple Creek," Wezel suddenly remarked, dryly.

They were sitting waiting in the bar.

"Why, where is he?" asked Fay, looking up.

There was a pause.

"He's dead," said Houghteling, at last.

"I killed him," ventured Alfie with a waver in his voice. He hadn't liked to examine Wivvers to see if he was really dead.

Then he said more steadily, seeing Fay still

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as calm as usual: "I should be sorry, only he shot me first. Besides, I think he's better out of the way."

"Amen!" added Wezel, emphatically.

Fay stared at Alfie's arm in the white sling. Finally she said, as if beginning a new subject of conversation: "I don't know what I'm going to do."

"You wouldn't have married him," declared Alfie.

"Maybe I would," she said simply.

"I'll tell you what you'll do," said Alfie, with an evident effort, getting up and going over to her, and looking at her green sleeves; "you come to Denver with me."

"I ain't got no money to go," drawled Fay.

"Never you mind," he smiled at her now. "I've got enough. Go up and get your things ready."

"Well, I can decide while I'm a-packin'," said Fay, and left the room.

Stange stared after her, his back to the others, and then went out, too. Houghteling immediately following, found him walking in front of the hotel.

"You don't intend to take her," he said, facing Alfie.

"I do, too," Stange answered defiantly.

"What are you going to do with her?"

"Take her to Colonel Monroe's wife. She

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told me she had the hell of a time finding a good steady girl."

"Nonsense!"

"She's too nice a little girl to leave in this God-forsaken hole, Dan."

"It's best for a soldier to leave his sweethearts where he finds them, Alf. Among other women, you'd soon see what a hulking farmer she is. Mrs. Monroe wouldn't want her. And ten to one it'd mean unhappiness either for you or the girl. Better drop it, boy."

"It's none of your damned business!" said Stange, rather weakly, looking at his friend's eyes for one instant.

Then he turned and walked away. Houghteling watched him a moment, and angrily went in again. Soon after he heard some one come in and go whistling upstairs.

Half an hour later the Captain had his men and his prisoners lined up at the station. Dumain was there, too, and Wezel to see them off. Houghteling paced alone up and down the platform. As he passed the door, Alfred Stange came out. The smoke of the approaching train could be seen far down the tangent. Houghteling halted.

"Where is the girl?" he asked in a lowered voice.

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Alfie joined him, and they walked up the platform again.

"The girl trun me down," he said debonairly.

"I guess you trun the girl down," said Houghteling, with a look of relief.

"The girl trun me down, I tell you. That's a privilege ladies have."

Houghteling put his arm round Alfie's shoulder.

"That's my bad arm. Damn you!" cried Alfie, wincing.

Houghteling dropped his hand. Then Alfie put his good left arm round Houghteling's shoulder.

THE END

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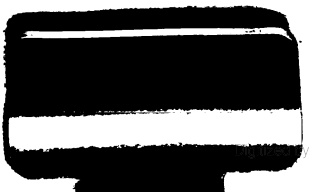
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